

PLUCK AND LUCK

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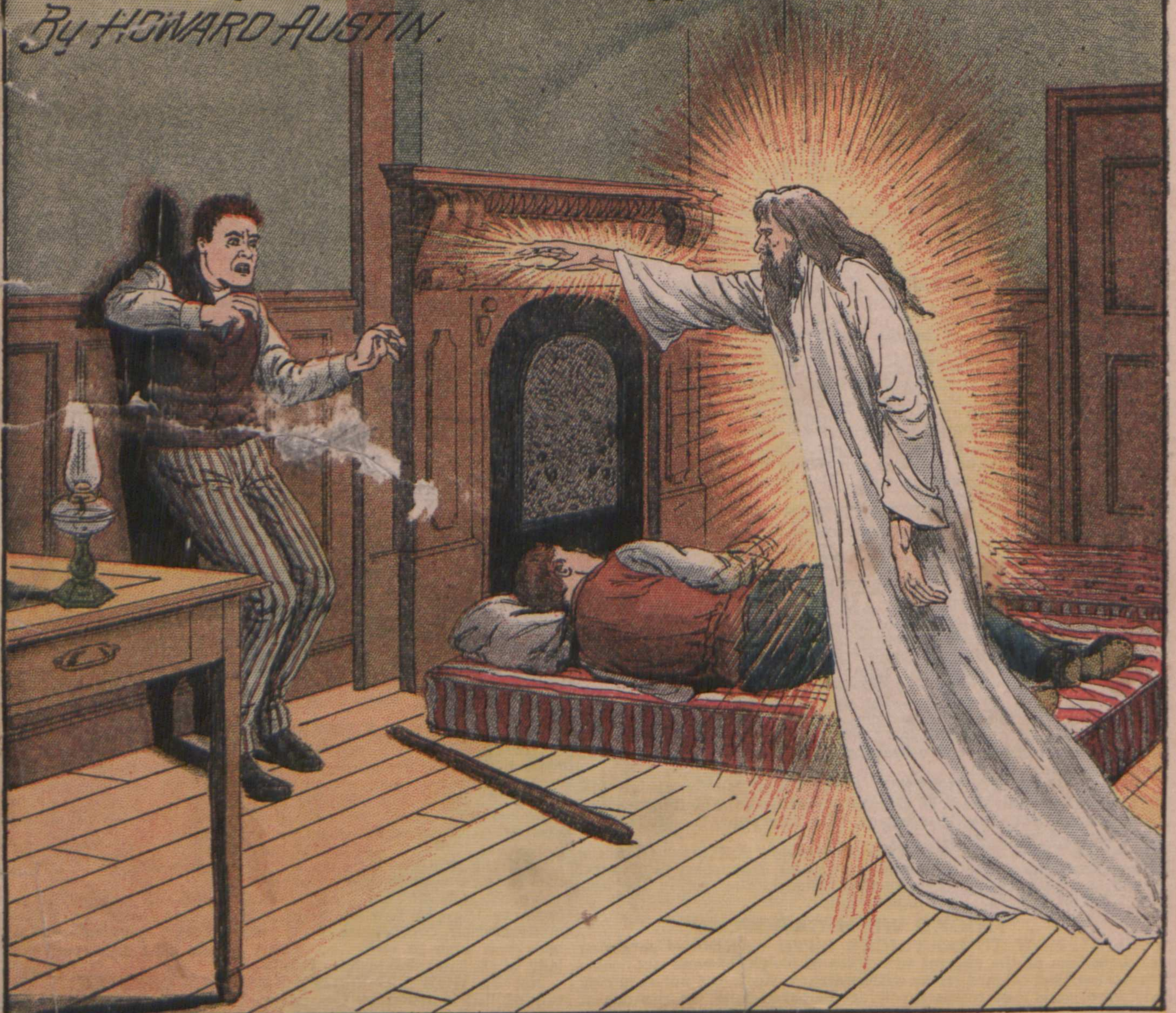
No. 273.

NEW YORK, AUGUST 26, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE ON THE HARLEM; OR, THE MYSTERY OF A MISSING MAN.

By HOWARD AUSTIN.



Directly at his feet a tall, stately creature seemed to rise as though coming out of the very floor. It was a man, although dressed in a long robe of dazzling whiteness and glittering from a thousand flaming points.

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NEW YORK, AUGUST 26, 1903.

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The Haunted House on the Harlem:

OR,

The Mystery of a Missing Man.

By **HOWARD AUSTIN.**

CHAPTER I.

FIRST VISIT TO THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Good-by! Good-by, Miss Edith."

"Good-by, Mr. Willing!"

"Good-by, Mrs. Grassland. I shall send you my address as promised."

"Do so by all means, Mr. Willing. We shall expect you to be on us just as soon as we are settled."

"Which I shall certainly do, Mrs. Grassland."

"Oh, it's Edith you will call on. You needn't look at me, Mr. Willing."

"I beg your pardon. I——"

"Carriage is all ready, madam," said the hack driver engaged by Jack Willing to convey Mrs. Grassland and her daughter to the hotel, stepping up to the group and making his announcement for the third time at least.

And it was the last.

Jack Willing helped Mrs. Grassland and her pretty daughter into the carriage and they were driven rapidly off the White Star Line pier.

"Upon my word, you have managed to shake them at last," grumbled Mr. Butterman, a New York attorney. "I thought you would never get through saying good-by, young man. Come now and dine with me at the Astor House. We will talk over our matters there."

Half an hour later Jack Willing and Mr. Butterman found themselves in the full enjoyment of an Astor House dinner.

To Jack, who had just come from Paris, where he had been since his fourteenth year, under the strict discipline of a private military school, the voyage, the flirtation with pretty Edith Grassland, the flattery of her widowed mother, and the obsequiousness of Mr. Butterman, who had met him on the pier, were all novelties, and very interesting ones.

At Rouveysol's Academie Militaire, Jack had been knocked about with the rest of the boys, and, indeed, had fared harder than most others in some particulars, for, be it known, that Jack was a mystery unto himself.

From his earliest recollection he had been pushed about from one English school to another, never knowing anything

more about himself than his name, and never quite sure of that, and that somebody paid his bills regularly, until one day he received a letter from Mr. Butterman, informing him that he was to come to New York by the next steamer and enter college in America, adding the pleasing information that at his majority he would come into a large estate.

Now the day on which Jack Willing landed in New York happened to be his birthday. He was just eighteen.

This, briefly told, was Jack's entire history, so far as it was known to himself.

"Young man," said Mr. Butterman, in his slow, pompous way, "are you aware that a great future lies before you? I hold in my hands the title deeds to real estate amounting to more than a million which will be yours just three years from to-day."

"I'm sure it was a great surprise to me, sir, when I got your letter," answered Jack, not knowing what else to say.

"Providing," continued Mr. Butterman, solemnly, "that one piece of information concerning you can be gained."

Jack's countenance fell.

There was a hitch there, it seemed. He had not been prepared for this.

"What's the nature of the information, sir?" he asked anxiously.

"Its nature is of the highest importance. It is the proof of your birth. It is legal evidence, showing that you actually are Jack Willing, and not somebody else."

"Well, I'm sure I'm nobody else but myself, sir."

"Technically I am equally sure, since I have had the pleasure of paying your bills for the last eighteen years; legally it is different. It is necessary to find a certain paper. This, it has been promised, shall be forthcoming on your arrival. As soon as you are through your dinner we are to go to a certain house, where I hope to receive the paper. If it is so received, well and good. If not——"

Here Mr. Butterman paused.

"Well, sir, what will happen in that case?" asked Jack, after waiting a moment.

"In that case," said Mr. Butterman, slowly, "I shall not feel justified in advancing any more money on your account until

it is received, and I shall advise you to seek a position where you can earn your own living."

"But——"

"Pardon me, I can say no more just now."

"But at least you can tell me who I am, who my parents were; why——"

"Pardon me. Those are the very things I cannot tell."

Nor did he tell.

Mr. Butterman showed his readiness to talk about anything and everything but these points, the very ones upon which Jack was most anxious to be informed.

After dinner, the lawyer called a carriage, and, in company with Jack, started uptown.

"The house we are going to," he said, "is an old mansion situated on the north bank of the Harlem, nearly opposite the McComb's Dam bridge. It is a part of what I suppose to be your property. Indeed, I don't see any reason why I should not tell you that it was built by your great grandfather, and is the old family mansion. As I understand it, you were born in that house, but for years it has been closed up. Let me add that in common with the rest of the property it is not altogether in my charge, but is looked after by an agent. The reason it is not rented is owing to the evil reputation it bears. In short, it is said to be haunted. As a sensible man, I do not believe in such things, and I trust you do not, either. That is all I have to say."

And it was quite enough to excite Jack's curiosity, but not another word could he get out of Mr. Butterman upon the subject of this mysterious house.

Altogether Jack found his spirits falling, and by the time they had crossed the Harlem he began to feel very much depressed.

Soon they found themselves running abreast of a high stone wall, with a heavy growth of trees behind.

In a few moments they came to a gateway, through which the carriage turned, and following a broad, ancient-looking mansion built of gray stone.

The month was May, the year—but no matter about that; it was some years ago—and the hour just at sunset.

Instructing the driver to wait, Mr. Butterman alighted, and bidding Jack follow him, opened the big front door with a huge brass key, which he drew from his trousers' pocket.

"He even knows how long it has been since that door was opened before," he said. "Gloomy old barracks, ain't it? I don't wonder nobody wants to live here. I wouldn't take it rent free!"

"I suppose it can be hired very cheap?" ventured Jack, not knowing what to say.

"On the contrary, I believe the agent asks an exorbitant rent for it," replied Mr. Butterman. "If I was possessed of any real power in the matter I would have pulled it down long ago, and cut the grounds into building lots. Why, it's worth a small fortune! But come, let's go upstairs."

The house was unfurnished, and everything thick with dust.

Wonderingly Jack followed the lawyer up the broad staircase to the floor above.

Being an open, free-hearted fellow by nature, Jack did not relish the mystery in which he now found himself involved, but what could he do?

Clearly there was nothing to be done but to stick close to Mr. Butterman, for better or for worse.

Even the lawyer seemed rather nervous, and stood looking this way and that when they reached the landing, where the last rays of the setting sun penetrated dimly through the window at the end of the long passage.

"I am trying to make out which room I am to enter," he said, waving his hand generally at a number of doors which opened off the passage. "Let me see, I have a letter of in-

struction here, if there's light enough left to read it by." He walked to the end of the passage and producing a letter perused its contents in the failing light.

"This is the door," he said, returning. "Now then, Jack your fate hangs upon what I find in this room. Wait for me a moment and it will all be settled."

Whereupon Mr. Butterman opened the first door from the stairs on the right hand side of the passage, and closing it carefully behind him, disappeared within the room.

It was a momentous moment for Jack Willing.

Burning with impatience, he stood waiting for Mr. Butterman's return.

But it was not written in Jack's book of destiny that he should wait long without further mystery.

Three minutes elapsed, perhaps four; the gloomy passage had grown a shade darker, when all at once a strange sound burst from the room into which Mr. Butterman had passed.

It was a wild cry; a cry suggestive of some lost soul in agony. It echoed through the long passage dismally, dying away in the distance only to be followed by a wild demoniacal laugh.

Jack was terribly frightened.

His breath almost ceased. His very hair seemed to rise in horror.

To save himself from perdition he could not have moved a foot beyond where he stood.

What could it be?

Ghosts?

Ghosts are popularly supposed to wait until the midnight hour.

"Something has happened to Mr. Butterman in that room," thought Jack. "If I don't go to his help I'm a coward. It will take more than that to scare me!"

He boldly seized the knob and opened the door.

Now, something certainly had happened to Mr. Butterman, but what it was Jack Willing did not find out then.

Nothing but emptiness met his gaze as he entered the room.

It was a large, unfurnished apartment into which he had penetrated.

There was dust and cobwebs in plenty, but no Mr. Butterman.

There was no other door than the one by which the lawyer had entered, and each of the window sashes was found to be nailed securely.

The long and short of the matter was Mr. Butterman had vanished.

He had entered this room, but he did not come out again. Strangely, mysteriously, the lawyer had disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

SECOND VISIT TO THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Young man, do you know that there is something very strange in all you tell me?"

"It is very strange to me," replied Jack Willing, meeting the steady gaze of Harry Halstead, the rising young detective of the — Agency, unflinchingly. "If you doubt my having told you the truth, sir, you had better not take up the case."

"Not at all; not at all!"

"No; not at all."

"I don't mean that. I mean that I do not doubt your having told me the truth at all, but will have to get at the truth somehow. Here's this man Butterman missing for three days; left his business, his family; everything in confusion, and no reason for his disappearance. Is that not strange?"

"Very; but I'm as badly affected by it as any one can be.

Here I am, a stranger in New York, with only a few dollars in my pocket. What am I to do?"

"I thought you said you were rich?"

"So Mr. Butterman told me, but where is Mr. Butterman?"

"Sure enough. But his clerk?"

"Knows nothing of his affairs or mine."

"The agent for this estate?"

"I do not even know his name, nor does Mr. Butterman's clerk."

"Well, it's a strange business. However, I am willing to try my hand at the case. I'll meet you—let me see—I'll meet you at the haunted house at four o'clock."

"Do you propose to begin operations there?"

"Yes."

"But the whole place has been searched thoroughly, first by the hackman and myself, again by the police."

"Can't help it. That's where Mr. Butterman disappeared, and that is where I shall begin my search for him. Be on hand, Mr. Willing, and you'll not find me behind time."

Jack Willing found himself in a bad fix the day he had this interview with Detective Harry Halstead at the rooms of the agency.

He had not a friend in New York; no, not one in America.

He was nothing but a boy after all, and after having left the French school, and come three thousand miles on the assurance of Mr. Butterman that he was worth at least a million, it was a pretty serious matter to have the old lawyer suddenly disappear like this.

After searching the house that night in company with the hack driver, Jack applied to the police.

Nothing came of it.

Mr. Butterman was a man of no more prominence than a thousand other lawyers in New York.

There was no money in the case, consequently the police took no interest in it.

Jack was finally informed that the story of his wealth was probably a "fake," and Mr. Butterman had probably run away for reasons best known to himself.

Next Jack hunted up Mrs. Butterman, and they conferred together.

He found her a very dull person, with no knowledge whatever of her husband's affairs, but out of this came the engagement of Harry Halstead, the detective, as bright a man as Jack could have had if he had known New York like a book.

Even Mrs. Grassland and her daughter, who had shown Jack so much attention on the voyage out, seemed to have vanished.

Twice Jack sent his card to the address the widow had given him, but no invitation came to call.

At four o'clock that afternoon Jack Willing met Harry Halstead, the detective, on the steps of the haunted house.

"Hello, young man!" exclaimed Harry, in his hearty way. "You're on time, I see."

"Yes, sir," answered Jack.

"Needn't 'sir' me. I'm only a few years older than you are. Have you got the key to this old barn?"

"Here it is."

"Wonder the police didn't take it from you."

"So they did, but they gave it back again."

"You came with them when they made their examination?"

"No, I didn't. They kept me in the station house for four hours. I thought at one time they were going to say I murdered Mr. Butterman."

"Do you know," said Harry Halstead, as he turned the key in the lock, "you were very lucky not to get caught in that snap. However, you escaped it, and—Hello, who have we here?"

"Beware! Beware!" croaked a cracked voice behind them.

"Many a man has gone in through that door, good gentlemen, who never came out again. Beware!"

"Why, you horrible old witch! What are you giving us?" cried the young detective lightly. "Be off with you! One sight of your ugly face is enough to scare the crows."

At the foot of the steps stood the hideous old crone who had spoken.

Clothed in filthy rags, bent nearly double with age, and with face horribly wrinkled, she certainly deserved the imputation the detective cast upon her in one sense of the word.

But it is not right to make sport of the aged and unfortunate, and punishment is sure to follow to those who do so.

"Hush! Hush!" whispered Jack. "She's some poor old wretch who has strayed into the grounds."

But before Jack had time to say any more the old woman had fully shown that so far as her tongue went she was able to take care of herself, for she began abusing them furiously.

"Go on! Go on!" she screamed, after calling them names which we should not care to write. "Go on! You'll be swallowed up like the rest. Ha, ha, ha! You wouldn't listen to the warning of old Lize! No, no! Go your ways and I'll go mine! Ho ho!"

She hobbled along among the shrubbery, shaking her stick at them, and disappeared from view.

"Wretched old tramp!" sneered the detective. "It only goes to show what a bad name this house has got. I'll bet you what you like it's a hangout for some gang or another. They won't get me as they got Mr. Butterman, though. Now, you see."

"You'd better be careful," said Jack. "I'm sure of one thing. Mr. Butterman had no more idea of vanishing than you have now."

"I ain't so sure of that. There's always a key to unlock every mystery. There's a key to the mystery of this missing man, you can just bet."

"If we could only lay our hands on it."

"Which we must try to do. Remember, this is broad daylight. We needn't be afraid of ghosts now. Show me the room where Mr. Butterman disappeared, young man, and we'll start in and look for our clew."

Now, there's nothing like self-confidence, and Harry Halstead was possessed of plenty of that commodity.

He led the way upstairs as bold as brass, and when Jack showed him the door of the fatal room he opened it and went straight in.

"So this is the place?"

"This is the place."

"Upon my word, I don't see where he went to."

"That's just it."

"His footsteps might have been traced in this dust easy enough if it hadn't been trodden all over by you and the hackman and the police and a dozen others, until there's no telling one footprint from another. I suppose you never once thought of noticing them when you first came in?"

"No."

"More's the pity. Let's see, let's see. Only one door—windows all nailed down, nothing left but the chimney, unless—hello, what's that?"

Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!

Someone was knocking on the door, and what was more, knocking very loud.

"Just see who that is, Willing," said the detective, who was pulling away the fireboard of the chimney at the time.

Jack advanced to the door rather gingerly.

Had some one followed them into the house?"

"Perhaps it is the old woman again," he thought, as he threw the door wide open.

"Why, there's no one here!" he exclaimed. "What can it mean?"

The passage was quite empty, but what struck Jack stranger still was the fact that no answer came from Detective Halstead.

With his hand still holding the door knob he turned to ascertain the reason of this.

To his utter astonishment he found that Harry Halstead had vanished.

He stood in the mysterious room alone.

CHAPTER III.

THIRD VISIT TO THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"Mrs. Grassland presents her compliments to Mr. Willing, and would be pleased to have him call, taking this opportunity to inform him that she has engaged the old Manor House on the Harlem, known as Beechwood, which she has fitted up with every modern convenience for summer boarders, etc."

This is the way the letter began, and it ended up in a careful description of the situation of Mrs. Grassland's summer boarding-house, so that Jack Willing could not possibly offer as an excuse for not accepting the invitation his inability to find the place.

"Well, upon my word, the post-office people did well to trace me out!" exclaimed Jack, as he folded up the letter. "I don't believe they could have done it in Paris. Well, it is unnecessary to say I'll call, and what's more I'll call this very night."

A full month had elapsed since Jack's second visit to the haunted house on the Harlem, and matters had assumed a very bad shape for our young friend during that time.

It was all owing to the strange disappearance of Harry Halstead, the detective.

Without spending time doing dry details, let us state that from the moment when Jack turned to answer the knock at the door of that fatal room, Harry Halstead had been seen no more.

It was very mysterious—very puzzling.

Not a trace of the detective could be found, and Jack, who did the only thing he could do under the circumstances, went to the police and got into a peck of trouble for his pains.

They locked the boy up, and kept him in jail for three weeks.

Meanwhile, the missing detective was sought for in every direction, and the haunted house ransacked from cellar to roof.

Nothing came of it.

Detective and lawyer had vanished alike, and when at last Jack Willing was set free, for, of course, nothing could be proved against him, he found himself in a bad fix.

His funds were about all gone; a cloud of suspicion hung over him. He had not one friend in all New York to turn to, he sought employment in vain.

On this Saturday night, just as he was beginning to get desperate, there came to the cheap boarding-house at which he was staying this letter from Mrs. Grassland.

No wonder the boy was eager to accept the invitation, for he had come back to his room almost beside himself with anxiety, having less than five dollars left of the money Mr. Butterman had sent him.

Moreover, Jack thought he was in love with Edith Grassland, and had been in the lowest depths of despair when he felt that he should never again see the pretty blonde, who had flirted with him on the passage out. So taken altogether, Jack lost no time in making for Harlem.

He had to go by the Eighth avenue horse cars, for there were no elevated railroads in those days, and a long, tedious trip he found it.

In fact, it was half-past seven o'clock when he finally located Beechwood.

Judge of his tremendous surprise at finding that it was none other than his haunted house.

He could scarcely understand it, yet there it was.

The gate had been repaired, the shrubbery trimmed, the walk weeded.

When he reached the broad piazza the windows were wide open, and lace curtains fluttered behind them. The big front door was open, too, and a handsome hanging lamp burned in the hall, while on the mat lay a big Newfoundland dog, who gave his tail a wag of welcome as Jack approached.

In fact, but one room in the front of the house was dark, and that was the one in which the mysterious disappearances had taken place.

Jack rang the bell, and was promptly admitted by the colored man who appeared in answer.

He had not taken three steps along the carpeted hall, when Edith, all in white, came flying down the stairs and gave him a warm welcome.

Mrs. Grassland followed more sedately, but her welcome was just as hearty.

She had taken the house for the summer, furnished it from top to bottom, at great expense, and just moved in.

There were no boarders yet, it seemed, in spite of advertisements in all the papers.

In fact, Mrs. Grassland appeared to be rather discouraged.

Jack thought he could have explained why, but so kindly did the ladies receive him that he hadn't the heart to say a word.

The next thing in order was to be asked to supper, and following this came an invitation to stop over Sunday, for this happened to be Saturday night.

It is hardly necessary to say that these invitations were accepted.

Jack passed a delightful evening.

Edith played on the grand piano, and sang sweetly, Jack joining her.

At eleven, Mrs. Grassland retired, leaving the young folks still singing in the parlor.

Before Jack fully realized the peculiarity of his situation the clock on the mantel chimed out the midnight hour.

Edith was singing an old song which Jack had specially asked for, and the young man was bending over the piano ready to turn the leaves, when all at once a hoarse voice rang out behind them.

"Ha, ha, ha! This is a pretty how to do! A pretty how to do! Go upstairs, young people, and look in the haunted room. Dinner's all ready, and waiting for you. Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

It kept right straight up to the last word, and not a soul to be seen.

Meanwhile, Edith had screamed and sank half-fainting into Jack's arms.

When Jack dashed out upon the piazza, there was no one there either.

Edith followed him, trembling from head to foot.

"Oh, Mr. Willing, who could it have been?"

"I'm sure I cannot tell, Edith. The voice seemed to come out of empty space. I could see no one."

"Nor I."

"Do you know——"

"What?"

"I am going to obey that voice. I want to look in the room overhead."

"Oh, but you mustn't!"

"Why?"

"Because——"

"Because what, Edith?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Mr. Willing, we got this house cheap for the summer, because it has the reputation of being haunted. Mamma promised that room should not be opened, for that's where the ghosts are supposed to be."

But this only made Jack more determined.

There could no longer be excuse for silence.

As they stood there on the piazza he told Edith his own experiences in the house.

"Oh, dear me! What shall we do? We will never get any one to board with us, Mr. Willing."

"Perhaps you may. I know what I'm going to do, though."

"You are determined?"

"To go to that room—yes."

"But it is locked."

"Have you the key?"

"It hangs on a nail outside."

"Come, then—let us do it."

It was strange how Jack persisted.

Something seemed to impel him to obey that mysterious voice.

In the end he persuaded Edith, and they ascended the stairs together. Jack took the key from the nail and fitted it in the lock.

"If you want to go back to the parlor now is your time," Jack said. "As for me, I have begun this thing, and I am going to see it through."

"No, no. I wouldn't go back downstairs alone for anything; but I tell you there's nothing in the room."

"You've been in there then?"

"Yes, indeed."

"But——"

Ding-a-ling! Ding-a-ling!

Right in the midst of Jack's sentence a bell rang out behind the door of the mysterious chamber, which an instant later was thrown open by invisible hands, revealing a sight startling enough to scare even Jack Willing.

Instead of the dusty chamber he had seen before, the room was elegantly furnished, not as a chamber at all, but as a dining-room.

Through the center ran a long table covered with a white cloth, fine china, silverware, etc., and fairly groaning beneath a spread of roast meats, choice vegetables, fruits, and pastry.

Edith gave one gasp and clutched Jack by the arm.

"Look—look!" she breathed, in a frightened whisper, at the same time pointing to the floor just within the threshold.

Jack's eyes turned from the table, around which he had discovered stood just thirteen chairs.

To his added amazement, he saw the figure of a colored man, wearing a snow-white apron, suddenly rise up before him as if from out of the floor.

"Young leddy an' ge'man, de dinner am serbed," he said, waving his hand toward the table.

To save him Jack could not have spoken now, but his eyes followed the movement of the hand.

Where the chairs had been empty before, each was now filled.

Filled—yet not filled! for above each floated the head and bust of a man, or a woman, while below there was nothing but empty space.

It was all horribly real, too!

At the head of the table floated the bust of an elderly man with a snow-white head.

Next to him was half of a handsome young lady, one hand plying a fan, while Jack could see the wall where her body ought to have been and the empty chair beneath.

So it was all around the table, first a gentleman, then a lady, in a half length, as it were.

They seemed to be talking to each other and laughing, yet

not a sound could be heard, when all at once Edith, with a loud scream, fell fainting into Jack's arms.

Presto—change!

Like a flash all had vanished!

Before Jack's eyes now was nothing but the empty room with its cobwebs and dust!

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

More disturbed for the moment by the sudden fainting of Edith Grassland than by all the ghosts of the haunted chamber, Jack did what any sensible young fellow would have done under the circumstances—took the girl up in his arms and carried her out of the room just as fast as he could possibly go.

What was to be done?

To call out and wake up Mrs. Grassland might make things decidedly unpleasant.

Who could tell what a smart, self-assertive woman like the widow might do if she were suddenly to come out of her room and find her daughter in Jack's arms?

The bare thought of such a contingency made Jack lay Edith down upon the sofa as soon as he got into the parlor to which he carried the girl with all possible speed.

Then, to his surprise, Edith revived immediately, and sat up, looking so bright, that in spite of his devotion Jack began to wonder whether she had actually fainted or not.

"Oh, Mr. Willing, wasn't it terrible?" breathed Edith, seizing Jack's arm and clinging to him convulsively.

"It is the strangest thing in the world, Edith. Stranger than you have any idea of. I—I haven't told you all."

It was a moment for mutual confidence, being after midnight, and the circumstances so very strange.

It is not to be wondered at that Jack told Edith all about the strange old mansion—all about his own strange experiences in it, we mean—and the result was anything but pleasant, for Edith began to cry, and went into regular hysterics then and there on the parlor sofa.

Jack was in a terrible pickle to know what to do, and had just about made up his mind that this time Mrs. Grassland really must be called, when all at once Edith was herself again.

"Oh, Jack!" she said gaspingly, "what is to be done? Nobody will ever come to board with us in this dreadful house."

"I'm afraid not, Edith," replied Jack. "Hadn't you better go to bed?"

"No, no! I could never go to sleep if I did. Just think of it, Jack, poor mamma has spent her last cent in furniture and advertising, and now we shall have to go. Oh, we shall certainly have to go!"

"I don't see how you can stay if this sort of thing is going to continue, Edith."

"No, no! Of course we can't. But it's all so strange. I can scarcely realize it now. I can't believe we really did see what we thought we saw, and where did they all go to? One moment they were there. The next when I looked for them they had all vanished. Was that the way it seemed to you, Jack?"

"Just the way, Edith."

"It looked to me as though each chair had half a person floating over it."

"To me, too. I saw it just the same. But come, you had better go to bed, or at least, call your mother. It's getting very late."

"Oh, I couldn't call mamma. She'd be frightened to death. Don't think me crazy, Jack, but do you know what I'm just going to do?"

"What?"

"To see the inside of that room again."

"Oh, I wouldn't go there, Edith. Just think of what I have told you. Think of Mr. Buttermann—of the detective. Edith, I didn't like to tell you before, but I tell you now. I've been in prison for weeks on account of Detective Halstead's disappearance. If anything should happen to you, I don't know what I should do."

"Still I want to go, Jack. I must go! Something seems drawing me to that room."

She did not seem to understand what he was saying.

It was no use to oppose her.

The more Jack protested against it, the more Edith insisted, and when a woman insists she usually gets her own way, as everybody knows.

At last Jack yielded, and taking the lamp with them, the two went upstairs and paused before the door of the haunted room.

"Don't do it, Edith. Think again!" pleaded Jack.

"No, I'm going in. Open the door."

Jack sighed and gave it up.

This time the door was not locked, and Jack, anxious to be done with the disagreeable business, flung it wide open.

The haunted chamber was just as they had last left it. Not a trace of all they had seen before was visible now.

"Come, let us get out!" cried Jack. "We mustn't stay here."

"Just a minute," said Edith, who was walking about here and there, with her eyes everywhere.

"Edith! Edith!" called Mrs. Grassland's voice suddenly, from outside the door.

Now, upon hearing Mrs. Grassland call, Jack very naturally looked toward the door.

"Come, Edith," he whispered. "There's your mother. Come!"

There was no answer, and Jack instantly looked around again.

To his intense horror, Edith had vanished. He stood in the haunted chamber alone.

It was a fearful shock. Words fail us when we attempt to describe it.

The room was not so large but what Jack could see every part of it at a glance.

Here was the third mysterious disappearance.

Hardly knowing what he did, Jack rushed out, and darting to the door of Mrs. Grassland's chamber, pounded upon it like a madman, for when he got into the hall the widow was not visible, nor did he expect to see her. He felt that the voice was but a delusion.

It was the same dreadful business of the haunted chamber enacted again.

"Mrs. Grassland! Mrs. Grassland!" he shouted.

"What is the matter? Is the house on fire? Oh, what is it?" called the widow's voice, in frightened tones from within the room.

"Come, Mrs. Grassland! Come! Come! Edith!" called Jack, in an agony of terror.

Then everything seemed to whirl about him. He tottered and sank down into one of the hall chairs, knowing no more until he found Mrs. Grassland fully dressed bending over him, her face full of alarm.

"Mr. Willing! Are you sick? What has happened?" she gasped.

"Oh, Mrs. Grassland, how can I tell you?"

"But you must tell me instantly. I have been into Edith's

room—she is not there—she has not been there apparently. Tell me—tell me the worst at once."

Then Jack blurted it all out, speaking rapidly, saying he hardly knew what.

Mrs. Grassland listened, her face turning deathly white, but she never spoke until Jack had uttered the last word.

"Can this be true, Mr. Willing?" she then breathed.

"Every word of it. What shall we do? Oh, what shall we do? To call the police will not be the slightest use. I have tried that twice before. I tell you what the result was; I——"

"Stop! We do not want the police. Why did you not tell me all this before?"

"Mrs. Grassland, how could I? I was amazed when I found what house it was you had taken. Then I did not like to distress you. I was intending to tell you to-morrow, but——"

"But you put it off, and this is the result," interrupted Mrs. Grassland, with more of sorrow than anger in her voice. "Well, Mr. Willing, I don't know that I can blame you. Stay where you are and let me go into that room alone. I will then decide what is best to be done."

"For Heaven's sake, Mrs. Grassland, stop and think!"

"I'm thinking of my daughter. Don't try to interfere with me. I shall go."

She caught up the lamp, and gliding through the still open door of the haunted chamber, closed it after her.

In an agony of terror and uncertainty, Jack waited.

No sound came from the mysterious room as the moments slipped by, nor did Mrs. Grassland appear.

The suspense was getting terrible, and Jack could stand it no longer; and yet, for some reason or another, until now he had not been able to make up his mind to follow the woman into the room.

But now, just as he had resolved to do it, the door of the haunted chamber opened, and out walked Mrs. Grassland, looking as white as if she had seen a whole regiment of ghosts.

"It is all right about Edith, Mr. Willing," she said, in cold, hard tones. "Go to bed, and don't disturb yourself. I will see you in the morning and explain."

Whereupon Mrs. Grassland entered her own room, closed and locked the door.

Jack stood staring at her in utter amazement.

"All right about Edith!" he repeated. "How can it be all right? What can she mean?"

Evidently Mrs. Grassland knew more of the secrets of this strange old mansion than she had led him to believe, but as for going to bed, Jack would have as soon thought of going to the moon.

For nearly an hour he wandered about the house and grounds in a state of terrible uncertainty.

At last, worn out, he returned to the parlor, and sank into the big easy chair beside the still open piano.

Here he remained thinking, wondering, dreaming. At first his dreams were waking dreams, but before he knew it they became dreams in earnest.

Jack went fast asleep.

CHAPTER V.

SOME ONE WORSE OFF THAN JACK.

The sun was shining brightly when Jack Willing awoke.

Out on the lawn the robins were hopping, and the sparrows twittering in the trees.

Through the open windows the distant church bells of Harlem came pealing.

It was Sunday morning, and all was bright and peaceful. That horrible night had passed.

Jack was on his feet in an instant, ashamed of himself for having slept.

"I must find Mrs. Grassland instantly," he muttered. "What she knows she's got to tell."

These were his first thoughts as the recollection of the events of the night began to come to him.

His thoughts one half hour later were of a very different kind.

Again he stood by the open piano where those happy moments with Edith had been spent.

He was in a terrible state of perplexity—and why?

Simply because Mrs. Grassland had vanished, the colored man who opened the door the night before had vanished. There was not a trace of a servant even.

Jack had searched high, low, everywhere.

He occupied the house alone.

What was to be done?

Should he call the police and be sent to Sing Sing this time for his pains?

There was no use in calling the police. Nothing but trouble would come of it.

Moreover, when Jack made the search of Mrs. Grassland's chamber, the door of which he found wide open, he discovered that not only were the widow's outer wraps gone, but her bureau drawers were locked, and things generally left in such shape as to indicate that she had gone away deliberately.

It was the same in Edith's room and the room occupied by the servants. There was evidently a side to all this which Jack could not understand.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" he muttered aloud. "I am without money, I have no friends. What shall I do——"

"Do what I tell you, if you are wise," croaked a voice outside the piazza. "You ain't half as bad off as you think you are, Jack Willing, if you only won't be a fool!"

Jack did not wait to be spoken to a second time.

He made one dash out upon the piazza, and there stood the same horrible old hag who had appeared and disappeared on the evening of Harry Halstead's appearance and disappearance.

"He, he, he!" she chuckled. "So you've come back, have you? It didn't pay to insult old Lize, did it? Oh, no! Ho, ho, ho! Weeks and weeks in jail! Ha! Bread and water! He, he! So, so!"

It was these last words which made Jack keep cool.

"I didn't insult you, and you know it," he said.

The old crone seemed to shake with laughter.

"No, no, you did not. It is so. It was the other. You suffered for it, but he suffered, too."

"Where is he? For heaven sake, tell me if you know."

"I know nothing. I have all I can do to attend to my own business—and yours."

"Mine?"

"Yes, yours."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean this, Jack Willing!" hissed the hag, bending forward and leaning heavily upon her stick; "you are surrounded by enemies who would destroy you if they dared, but they do not dare. Listen! Mind what I tell you. Stay in this house. It is yours. Don't let them scare you away; but to-night go under the High Bridge at nine o'clock. Be sure. Do not fail. There is one worse off than you who needs your help. Farewell!"

Thus saying, old Lize glided off among the shrubbery, chuckling as she went.

Jack did not try to stop her.

He felt too badly mixed up to try to do anything.

Somehow he seemed nothing but a puppet in the hands of fate.

Thus he felt for the moment.

The next, when his mind had changed, he started to look for the old woman.

He sprang after her through the shrubbery, determined to make her tell more, but it was too late.

Lize had vanished, and search as he would she could not be found.

She had done her work, however.

All that day Jack Willing never left the haunted house on the Harlem.

Nobody came near him, either.

By the time night arrived Jack had come back to the settled determination to stick to the house.

There was plenty to eat in the larder—good beds to sleep in.

To return to his room downtown was only to be pitched into the street on account of his unpaid rent; to report to the police meant to be jailed again.

It was better than going hungry.

At half-past eight Jack closed up the house, locked the front door, put the key in his pocket, and strolled down the road toward High Bridge.

He had determined to tie to Lize; he was resolved to know if there was any truth in what she had foretold.

It was only a short distance to High Bridge.

As he approached, Jack climbed down the bank and walked along the shore underneath the mighty structure, but could see nothing unusual.

At first he began to think he had come on a fool's errand; then looking at his watch and seeing that it was not yet nine o'clock, he kept on down the shore, returning at the time named and passing by the big pillar again.

It was pitch dark under the bridge now, and Jack felt rather skittish about it, but not a living thing was to be seen.

He was just putting himself down for a fool when he heard a low, moaning cry behind him, followed by a sudden splash.

Jack turned in a hurry, and rushed to the water's edge.

A little further down a person could be seen struggling in the river.

"Hello! Hello, there!" called Jack.

"Help! I'm drowning! I can't swim a stroke!" answered a voice from the river faintly.

It was a woman's voice, Jack thought.

He saw a hand raised as though in mute appeal for help.

"By gracious! It's just as the old witch said," he murmured.

Without waiting for anything, he flung off his coat, kicked off his old shoes, and plunged into the Harlem, swimming straight for the drowning man.

He was down too soon for Jack, however.

He gave one cry as he sank—a cry of despair which rang in Jack's ears for a long time afterward.

But as soon as he rose to the surface Jack was ready for him, and caught him in the proper way, according to the instructions he had received from his swimming teacher in the French school.

Then he saw that it was a mere boy he had hold of.

Certainly the fellow was no older than himself.

Jack swam ashore with his burden the best he could, landing under the High Bridge.

It was not only a boy, but a handsome, intelligent-looking boy. Instead of being dressed according to his looks, however, he was clothed simply in an undershirt and a pair of tattered old trousers, held up by a strap.

No shoes and stockings, no hat.

Jack hauled him up, and stood him on his feet.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" he gasped.

It was some minutes before the boy could speak.

All the time he was coughing and gasping he kept tight hold of Jack, as though he was afraid he would get away.

"Did you jump in yourself, or were you pushed in?" demanded Jack. "Come, brace up, young fellow. Tell us who you are and what the matter is? Don't look so scared. No one will hurt you, I promise you that."

"I—tried to kill—myself!" burst from the boy, in a gasping, disjointed way.

"What did you do that for?"

"I—won't—tell."

"What's your name?"

"Walter."

"Walter what?"

"I won't tell."

"Where are your clothes?"

"I haven't got any, only what you see."

"The deuce! Why, the junkman wouldn't buy those by the pound. Haven't you really got any clothes?"

"No."

"Will you try to kill yourself again if I let go of you?"

"No, no! I'm sorry I did it. The water was cold! Oh, so cold."

"Look here, you young mystery," cried Jack, "are you going to tell me anything about yourself or not?"

"Oh, I can't—I can't do it. Let me stay with you; I'm very wretched. Please let me stay with you."

"I don't know about that."

"Do. I've no friends and no money. I haven't eaten anything in three days. My clothes were stolen from me by tramps. See how I am now, and before—before I got this way—I had everything that money could buy. Please let me stay with you to-night, and I'll go away in the morning if you say so. If you don't I shall jump into the water again."

Jack looked at the handsome, pleading face long and earnestly.

The sudden appearance of this boy seemed all part of the same strange business; still he hesitated.

How could he take a stranger into that dreadful house?

Suddenly as he stood there hesitating a stone dropped at his feet, striking with a force which showed Jack that it must have been flung down from the High Bridge overhead.

"Hist, hist, Jack Willing!" came a voice from high in the air above him. "If you won't help yourself you must help others. Remember what I told you! Take the boy up to the house."

Was it Lize who had spoken?

If so, then she must be on the High Bridge watching them.

It seemed wonderful that her voice could reach down to where they were.

But Jack could see nothing, nor did he hear anything more.

"Come, young fellow," he said, taking the arm of the trembling boy. "Come, Walter! Come home with me."

Home!

Was the haunted house on the Harlem a home for any one?

It was all the home Jack Willing had to offer just then, and he had come all the way from France in hope of a million.

How strange—how very strange it all seemed.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FLAMING GHOST.

"Well, young man, how do you feel now?"

"Oh, I'm better—so much better. I feel like a different person altogether."

This was said in Mrs. Grassland's dining room about an hour later.

Walter had just finished a substantial meal of canned salmon with bread and butter, which Jack had put before him.

He pushed back his plate, and declared that he could eat no more.

"Don't feel so much like drowning yourself now as you did?" asked Jack, who had determined to be cheerful himself and cheer this poor boy up the best he could.

"No, no! I am ashamed of it, but then I was in such terrible trouble."

"Won't you tell me about yourself—what your trouble is?"

"No, no! I can't! At least, I can't to-night. Perhaps I will in the morning. I'll think about it to-night."

"Perhaps I can help you."

"I don't believe you can."

"Well, then, if I can't help you, you can help me."

"I'm sure I'll do it if I can."

"Perhaps you'll say you are afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Ghosts!"

"Ghosts!" cried the boy, opening his eyes very wide. "Of course there are no such things. You don't believe in them, do you?"

"I didn't until I came to this house. Now I don't know whether I do or not. Haven't you wondered how I came to be in this great house all alone?"

"Yes; but since I can't answer your questions, I didn't feel that I had any business to be asking questions of you."

"Well, it wouldn't be much use. I feel just about as you do. I don't want to talk about it."

Then you can appreciate my feelings.

"I do. All the same, I want to know your story."

But Walter changed the subject.

"What about these ghosts?" he asked.

"There's just this much about them: There's a room in this house that's said to be haunted. I'm going to stay there to-night. Don't you want to stay with me and keep me company?"

"I'll stay wherever you do."

"Good! You're the right sort. Don't you want to know my name?"

"Yes."

"Jack."

"All right. Show me the room."

Jack took him into the haunted chamber.

It seemed almost wicked to let this unfortunate boy run the risk of vanishing like the rest, but Jack was determined to stay in the room himself, and he felt that he had rather have company than stay there alone.

Still he told Walter something of the mystery.

It made no difference.

The boy seemed scarcely to listen to him.

"I'll stay there if you do," was all he said.

"Then it's a go!" cried Jack. "I'll put a couple of mattresses in there, and we'll keep a light burning. I shall have a big club and you can have another. If the ghosts come we'll give 'em all they want and some to spare."

It was carried out just as arranged.

It was after ten o'clock when the boys retired to the haunted chamber.

Jack brought a table in to put the light on, and laid the mattresses side by side, and with their heads toward the chimney they laid down and began to talk.

Jack got to telling about his school scrapes and adventures in Paris.

He found Walter not only a good listener, but a bright, intelligent talker on every subject but his own affairs.

An hour passed, and nothing had occurred.

Jack, meanwhile, had taken a strong liking to his companion.

"He's a real nice fellow," he said to himself. "He can stay

here as long as I do. Perhaps that strange old creature will show up again to-morrow and give me another point. I'm determined to solve this mystery if it takes a year——"

This was after Walter had dropped asleep, which happened shortly after eleven, while Jack was in the middle of one of his school stories.

Until the big clock in the hall downstairs struck twelve Jack remained wide awake, but up to that time nothing had occurred.

"Upon my word, this is dull business," thought Jack, a ghastly chill creeping over him as he realized that the midnight hour had come. "I've a great mind to wake him up. I don't like—heavens! What's this?"

Suddenly the light went out, without even a warning flicker, and Jack found himself in the dark, with such a racket going on all about him as never man heard before.

It was for all the world as though a dozen musical instruments were playing at once, and in anything but harmony.

There were the sounds of drums, fiddles, tambourines, harmonicas and triangles all joined in one general medley.

The sounds seemed to come from all parts of the room at once.

Now they were here—now there—it was impossible to locate them.

Suddenly all was silent.

The effect was tremendous.

Jack leaped up, the cold perspiration standing from every pore.

"Walter! Walter!" he breathed.

There was no answer.

But right at that moment Jack forgot that he had called, for now something occurred which made his very hair stand on end with horror.

Directly at his feet a tall, stately creature seemed to rise, as though coming out of the very floor.

It was a man, although dressed in a long robe of dazzling whiteness and glittering from a thousand flaming points.

It was a man, because it wore a beard.

The beard was long and as white as the flaming robe.

The face and bust Jack had seen before floating above the chair at the head of that mysterious table shown on the previous night.

It was the same face and the same head.

But here now was the entire man.

With one hand outstretched, from each finger end fire seemingly darting, the figure advanced with slow and measured tread directly toward the spot where Jack Willing stood helpless with horror—unable to move so much as an inch.

CHAPTER VII.

WAS THIS A DREAM?

Now, Jack Willing had he been a coward had every chance to show it then.

It took downright courage to stand still and face that tall, ghostly figure with its shining robe and flowing beard.

And yet it was not all courage. No doubt Jack's very feelings of horror helped him to hold his own.

It was coming now, he thought.

It was his turn; he must go the way that all the rest had gone who ventured into the haunted chamber.

Then strange feelings began to come over him, strange thoughts to flit through his head.

He could see the figure standing directly in front of him.

It had ceased to advance, and was moving its hands up and down rapidly before Jack's face.

As the hands moved, Jack could not take his eyes off of them—all fear seemed to leave him, and instead of regarding the fiery figure with terror, he began to think of it as a man, a friend.

Still the old man continued his strange manipulations, never uttering a word.

Suddenly he stopped, and beckoning to Jack to follow, glided across the room to one of the windows overlooking the Harlem, out of which he pointed off upon the river.

Now, the blinds were closed outside this window, and it was necessary to peer through the slats.

Jack did this.

It seemed as though he had to obey the old man whether he wanted to or not.

But the instant he looked, he found himself whirling downward.

Window—room—everything vanished.

He was standing in the most utter darkness with the illuminated figure by his side.

Still he felt no fear, nor was any word spoken. Even when the old man grasped his hand, he did not feel afraid.

The grasp was substantial, the hand feeling anything but ghostly. It seemed to draw him forward, and then Jack saw in front of him, as though at a great distance, a single ray of light.

It was toward this that he was being drawn, and almost before he knew it he was there.

Unseen hands now seemed to seize his head and pull it forward, and then his eyes were filled with the light.

Now all had changed; the darkness vanished, and Jack Willing found himself looking upon a most remarkable scene.

Before him was a room, brilliantly lighted, and furnished as magnificently as any Fifth Avenue salon.

It was not so much the room, however, as the people in it which aroused Jack's wonder. He could scarcely believe what he saw—it seemed too preposterous—too unreal.

There were about twenty people in the room—men and women—all in full evening dress.

Among them Jack, to his utter amazement, beheld several familiar faces.

There were Mr. Butterman, Detective Harry Halstead, Edith Grassland and her mother.

Edith was at the piano playing, although no sound of music reached Jack's ears.

Upon a sofa Mr. Butterman sat in earnest conversation with Mrs. Grassland.

Harry Halstead was waltzing with a pretty girl in blue, as were several other couples whose faces were strange to Jack.

And while he continued to gaze at this remarkable sight he saw the colored man who had admitted him to the house enter the room bearing a tray loaded with ices.

As he looked at the fellow he perceived what he had not noticed on the previous night.

It was the same darky who had announced the ghostly dinner.

Here was more mystery.

If the darky had been a live darky when he opened the door for Jack, he could not have been the ghost of a darky when seen in the haunted chamber later on.

Filled with wonder, Jack tried to speak, to question his conductor, but found it impossible.

He could not move his eyes from the light; he could not utter a sound.

Was he awake or was he dreaming?

With a mighty effort of will Jack tore himself away from the light, when suddenly everything seemed to spin about him—he felt himself falling, and—presto—change!

He was lying upon the mattress in the haunted chamber

with the lamp burning dimly upon the table and Walter in a peaceful sleep beside him.

All had vanished.

Jack was himself again.

Was it but a dream?

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOUT WALTER AND OTHER THINGS.

The moon was streaming in through the slats of the blinds when Jack came to himself, making the room so light that the lamp seemed scarcely necessary.

Jack was on his feet in a minute, rubbing his eyes and trying to collect his wits.

Was it all a dream?

He could not believe it.

It had been too vivid—too real.

But, on the other hand, how had he come back to the room if he had actually left it?

He went all over the chamber, examining everything with the greatest care.

That part of the floor where the illuminated figure had risen at his feet seemed as solid as all the rest.

There was nothing whatever to indicate that he had ever left the room at all.

But after pondering over the matter for a full hour and finding himself no wiser at the end of that time than he was at the beginning, Jack gave it up, and so shall we.

After that he did the most sensible thing he possibly could have done under the circumstances—stretched himself upon the mattress and closed his eyes, never expecting to sleep; and, for all that, sleep came, and Jack knew no more until he was awakened to find broad daylight streaming into the room, with the sparrows twittering like mad among the trees.

With the coming of daylight all belief in the reality of the strange experiences of the night vanished. It had been but a dream—it could have been nothing else.

He shook Walter until he awoke, when both boys went down into the kitchen and had a good wash at the sink.

"Anything happen last night?" asked Walter, rubbing his face vigorously with one of Mrs. Grassland's coarse towels.

"Well, I don't know whether there did or not," replied Jack.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Did anything happen to you, Walter?"

"Not a thing. I was off to sleep before I knew it. Never knew anything after that until you began shaking me to get up."

"Well, it wasn't so with-me."

"What do you mean? Something did happen, then?"

"I say just what I said before. I don't know whether there did or not. Maybe it was all a dream, but here goes, Walter. You shall know just what it is."

And Jack related his strange experiences from beginning to end.

"Of course, it must have been a dream."

"I suppose it must."

"Our watching in the haunted room don't seem to have amounted to much."

"Evidently not; but come, let us look up some breakfast. Here it is Monday morning, and I've got to decide what to do. I can't stay idle here."

Walter's face grew long.

"And what am I to do?" he murmured. "Look at me. Look at my clothes. I can't go anywhere the way I am."

"That's a fact. You'd be arrested. How did the tramps

come to get your clothes away? If you don't mind telling me that much, I'd like to know."

"Oh, that's no secret. I was walking along the railroad when three of them suddenly sprang upon me. I showed all the fight I had left in me, but it wasn't much, and didn't amount to anything. They had me down in no time, and stripped me to my undershirt. One of them pulled off his own pants and gave them to me; then they all lit out and left me to do the best I could."

"And you had to put the fellow's trousers on?"

"I couldn't do anything else, of course."

"What time was that?"

"About half an hour before you found me."

"Then that was the reason——"

"Hold on, Jack. Don't talk about that. I can't bear to think I was wicked enough to try to take my own life. Being robbed of my clothes was the last straw. I was in a fearful state of mind, and—and—well, never mind. I feel better now. Meeting you has done me lots of good."

"By George, I'm glad I'm able to do good to some one, then. I can't do much for myself, but I've got an idea about clothes for you."

"What is it?"

"We're in this house, and we may as well make the best of it."

"Decidedly."

"Suppose we go to the servants' rooms upstairs? There was a darky here when I first came, but he vanished like all the rest. He may have left some of his clothes behind him, though, and if he has we'll confiscate them, and you shall put them on."

Walter laughed heartily.

"Who'd ever thought I should be glad to get into a darky's clothes?" he exclaimed. "No matter, though. I'm here. If we can find them I'll put them on fast enough."

They hurried upstairs, and after a few moments' rummaging about among the chambers, sure enough, they did find just what they wanted. Hanging in a closet was a pair of trousers, with immense black and white checks, with a coat and vest nearly as loud, to match.

There were shirts, too, in the bureau drawer, with collars, cuffs and neckties.

After Walter got through dressing, he presented a most gorgeous appearance; but his wardrobe was now complete, even to a pair of patent leather shoes.

After that they had breakfast, and after breakfast Jack announced his intention of going downtown to look after the things he had left in his room.

"Not that I hope to get them," he added. "I'll do well if the landlady don't have me arrested. I'm going to try it, though, and see what can be done. Don't you want to go along with me and see the fun?"

"I suppose I may as well," answered Walter. "Of course you don't know me—you don't want to leave me here alone."

"Oh, it ain't that."

"Yes, it is that."

"If you'd only tell——"

"Hold on! I've been thinking the matter over. If you ain't my friend, I haven't one in the world."

"I'll do all I can for you."

"I'm sure of it, and I'm going to tell you something about myself. My name is Walter Ryman. I am the only son of Edwin Ryman, and nephew of Harris Ryman. There! What do you think of that?"

And Walter sat back in his chair just as though he expected to have Jack faint with surprise.

But Jack took it very coolly.

"I never heard those names before," he quietly said.

"Never heard of Harris Ryman?"

"Never. Remember, I'm not long in New York."

"That's so—I forgot. Well, my Uncle Harris is one of the richest men in New York. He is worth millions, and one of the most wicked men in the world. He is a perfect terror on Wall Street. He has crushed many and many a man, and made him a beggar. He is a liar, a thief, a——"

"Hold on—hold on!" cried Jack. "You'll have him a murderer next. Is he really as bad as you make him out?"

"Worse! He'd steal the pennies off his dead grandmother's eyes."

"What's all this to do with your story?"

"Everything. My father was a rich man, too. He told me before his death that he was worth half a million, and had left it all to me. You see, my mother has been dead for years, and I was an only child. We lived in a plain way, father and I, in an old-fashioned house in the Ninth Ward. When father died, that was about three months ago, Uncle Harris stepped in and took charge of everything. He took me to his home to live, and there I've been ever since until three days ago, when we had a blazing row and he kicked me out."

"What for?"

"Because I demanded to know how I stood. He never would tell me anything, never give me a cent of money, and would scarcely speak to me."

"But the rest of the family?"

"There isn't any rest. He's a bachelor; he lives all alone."

"Why didn't you consult a lawyer?"

"I tried to, but I hadn't any money, and he wouldn't listen to me."

"Oh, somebody can be found to listen to you."

"Well, never mind about that. The fact is, I was determined to find father's will or something to tell me how I stood. I tried, and he caught me."

"You mean your uncle?"

"Yes."

"What did he do?"

"Why, he fired me out, and I've been wandering around ever since in a dreadful state of mind. I want your advice, Jack. Father must have left me something—I'm sure of it."

"Well, come on downtown with me, and we'll talk it over," said Jack.

He locked up the house, and crossing the Harlem the boys started downtown.

When Jack got to his room he found everything all right, and, stranger still, he found a letter on his table and addressed to himself.

Upon opening the letter a hundred dollar bill dropped out. This was the strangest of all.

There was not even the scratch of a pen to tell where it had come from—just the hundred dollar bill.

"Hooray! This comes just in time!" cried Jack shaking the bill at Walter. "By gracious, I'm fixed now for weeks to come."

But the puzzle was who had sent it, and it seemed a riddle not very likely to be solved.

"No matter!" cried Jack. "We'll enjoy ourselves while we can, Walter. I'll pay the landlady, we'll have as good a dinner to-night as can be bought in New York, and wind up at the theater. Meanwhile, we'll see a lawyer about your affairs."

Walter was very grateful.

He became confidential, and told Jack how his uncle had used him, which was really very bad.

Then, one thing leading to another, he confessed that there was doubt about his own position.

Harris Ryman had told him he was only an adopted child and a foundling.

This altered matters.

The lawyer consulted would have nothing to do with the case.

"Bring some proof that you are really Edwin Ryman's son, young man; then I will talk to you," was all he would say.

When the boys came out of the theater that evening it was half-past eleven, the play having been an unusually long one.

Jack was in a happy-go-lucky frame of mind.

The events of the past few weeks had completely unsettled him.

Walter stuck close to him, and evidently had no idea of leaving him, nor did Jack think of telling him to go.

"Let's have some oysters," proposed Jack recklessly.

They went into a well-known Broadway saloon and sat down at a table.

Over their oysters they continued to discuss Walter's affairs.

"And you never had the least intimation from your father that you were an adopted child?" asked Jack.

"Never."

"Not even when he was dying?"

"No; but he died suddenly, as I told you. There was no time to speak then."

"Oh, yes, you told me that—that's so, but I was thinking—hello! What do you want?"

A strange figure had suddenly stopped beside the table, which happened to be near the door.

It was a woman, bent with age, and clothed in rags, her features almost entirely concealed by a curiously shaped bonnet.

"For the love of God, gentlemen, please help a poor old woman?" she whined. "I've not tasted a bite in a week."

"Get out of here! Get out!" roared the cashier of the saloon. "What do you mean by coming in here and disturbing my customers? Get out!"

But Jack, moved by charity, and feeling rich, slipped a dollar into the old crone's hand.

Instead of the profuse thanks he had expected, the old woman, without taking the slightest notice of the cashier's shout, bent forward and in hurried tones whispered loud enough for both boys to hear:

"The paper is concealed in a secret drawer in the old secretary. Pull the left hand pillar. Go for it, boys! Go for it to-night."

There was no time to say more, for the cashier had jumped off his high perch and was already after the supposed beggar, who glided toward the door.

"Get out of here! Don't you ever come in here again!" he roared, catching her by the shoulders and pushing her into the street.

But Jack had recognized the old woman by her voice.

It was old Lize.

CHAPTER IX.

DROPPED DEAD.

The effect produced upon the boys by the sudden appearance and disappearance of the mysterious old crone can better be imagined than described.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Jack, "I know that woman, Walter, and you ought to know her, too."

"I never saw her in my life," protested Walter, looking very much disturbed.

"You never did?"

"Never."

"And yet it was she who told me to go and look for you at nine o'clock underneath the High Bridge."

"What can you mean, Jack? How could any one possibly

know that I was going to be underneath High Bridge at nine o'clock last night, when I didn't have the faintest idea of going there until the tramp stole my clothes?"

"Can't help it. She is the old dame I told you about."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive, and I'm sure of another thing, too."

"What's that?"

"I'm sure that you know just what she meant by her mysterious words."

"Jack," whispered Walter earnestly, "you are right. I do."

"Well?"

"The old secretary was my father's. It is now in my uncle's house."

"You don't say so! And do you think the paper proving your identity may be there?"

"It is as likely to be there as anywhere."

"Did you ever hear of this secret drawer?"

"Never."

"By gracious, Walter!" cried Jack recklessly, "I tell you what it is, that old woman is a regular witch. If there is any way of getting into your uncle's house, I'd advise you to try it. I'll bet you anything you like her words come true."

"There is no trouble about getting in," said Walter slowly. "I've got a latch key in my pocket at the present moment. Uncle seldom comes home before one o'clock, and it ain't twelve yet. There's nothing at all to prevent me from slipping in and going for the secret drawer."

"Then I'd do it. Where does your uncle live?"

"Just a little way from here on Fifth Avenue between 27th and 28th."

"Let's hurry up and finish the oysters and we'll take a turn round there and see how the land lies," said Jack.

Jack spoke just as he felt. He was up to anything that night.

Moreover, he began to feel great confidence in old Lize and her sayings.

Before many minutes had passed the boys found themselves walking along Fifth Avenue.

Presently Walter pointed to a large brown stone mansion on their left, and announced that as his uncle's house.

"And that old fellow lives there?" exclaimed Jack.

"That's the house."

"Confounded old thief! If I were you I wouldn't think twice about going for him."

"Will you go with me?" asked Walter, turning on him suddenly.

This was altogether a different part of speech. Jack had not thought of that.

"Well, it ain't my business."

"That's true. We can do it in a minute, though. There's no light in uncle's room, and the servants are all abed long ago. I've got the latch key. All we've got to do is to slip in, go for the secret door, and slip out again."

It sounded very easy.

Remember, Jack knew very little of New York, and, after all, was nothing but a schoolboy, in spite of the fact that at his age boys in New York are generally far beyond their school days.

"Are you sure it can be done just as you say?" he questioned.

"Of course I am."

"There's no risk?"

"Not a bit."

"Well, then, I'll go. We'll stick together. You shall get the paper, and we'll steer straight for my room."

It was a strange experience for Jack, and when he got to the front door of the Ryman mansion he began to think that

he was engaged in a sort of business that looked very much like burglary.

He looked warily up and down the street to see if he could see a policeman.

He would sooner have encountered all the ghosts of the Haunted House on the Harlem than one officer of the law just then.

But there was none in sight, and by this time Walter had the door open.

"Come! Let's go in!" he breathed. "Just a minute, and the job is done."

"I'll stay here."

"No. Come on! Come on!"

Thus urged, Jack followed into the hall, where a single gas jet faintly burned.

Walter pushed the door shut, but did not latch it, and led the way through to the library.

"Got a match?" he whispered.

Jack had a match, and handed it over. His heart seemed to fly into his mouth as the gas flared up, revealing a handsomely furnished library.

He took courage, however, when he saw that they were alone.

"There's the secretary," whispered Walter, pointing to a quaint old piece of mahogany in one corner. "That was father's. It always stood——"

"Go for it! Go for it! Don't stop to talk," breathed Jack, whose ears were strained to catch every sound.

"All right! Don't you be afraid."

"Is it locked?"

"No. The key was lost before I was born."

"Open it, then."

"Not now, you young thief!" cried a voice behind them. "You will break into my house at midnight, will you? Ha! I have you where I want you now, you beggar's brat!"

Now, Jack was not aware that he was a beggar's brat, but the tall man, who suddenly glided from behind the portiere which separated the library from the front parlor, clapped a heavy hand on his shoulder and swung him around.

Jack tore himself free, and leaped for the door.

He did not lay a finger upon the man, or do anything to cause so startling an occurrence as immediately followed.

"Heavens! It's Uncle Harris!" burst from Walter at the same instant, when suddenly the man gave a sharp cry, pressed his hand to his head, and fell heavily to the floor.

"Great Scott! He's got one of his fits!" breathed Walter. "Now's our time. I'll have the paper in two shakes."

He sprang to the secretary and opened it, but Jack, more from curiosity than sympathy, bent down over the fallen millionaire.

Was it a fit?

If so, then it was a very strange one.

The man lay perfectly motionless—did not seem to be breathing.

Jack placed his hand upon his heart, for the truth had dawned upon him.

"Great heavens!" he whispered, "this is no fit. The man is dead."

CHAPTER X.

BLACKMAIL.

"He's dead, Walter—he is certainly dead."

"Great Scott! It certainly looks like it. We didn't touch him, Jack."

"Never laid a finger on him. He shoved me about, but I never touched him at all."

"Heavens! What shall we do?"

"You said something about fits. Was your uncle subject to fits, Walter?"

"Yes, he was."

"Like this?"

"No, no! Foamed at the mouth, turned and twisted."

"That's it—epileptic fits. It may be a new kind. We ought to have a doctor."

"Dear me—dear me!" murmured Walter. "If any one catches us here, we shall be accused of murdering him."

This was a highly cheerful suggestion. Worse still, Jack saw at a glance that it was true.

Then it began to dawn upon him that he was getting himself badly snarled up with another man's troubles.

But could he desert Walter then?

Hardly. Some might have done so, but it wasn't Jack's style.

"Hurry up and get the papers," he whispered, "and then we'll wake up the servants somehow."

"Oh, I'dassent do that! They know I was kicked out."

"Get the papers! Get the papers! Great Scott, man, we'll both be arrested for murder if we keep on fooling like this."

Walter pulled open the old secretary.

There were books and papers in the various pigeon holes. Between the pigeon holes on the right hand side and those on the left was a little door, and on either side of this door was a carved pillar.

Evidently old Lize knew what she was talking about.

Walter seized the particular pillar of which she had spoken, and out it came with a drawer behind it.

Out of this drawer he took a thin packet of papers, and held them up to the light.

"Great heavens! The old hag was right!" whispered Walter. "See here!"

He held up the packet so that Jack could see written on the outside:

"Papers relating to my boy, Walter E. Ryman."

"You've got 'em. Now, then, we must light out," breathed Jack.

Before Walter could reply, the portiere was thrown aside, and a man walked into the room.

"Too late!" gasped Jack, involuntarily. "We're in for it now!"

It was a foolish thing to say, but it is doubtful if the result would have been different even if he had not spoken.

The man was short, stout and clean shaven. His clothes looked as though they were pasted upon him, so snugly did they fit—especially the trousers—a shiny hat tilted rakishly to the left, and a long cigar in the right-hand corner of his mouth completed the picture. That they had a tough customer to deal with Jack saw at a glance.

"Say, looker here, you two," said the man, in low, menacing tones. "If the old snoozer is dead there's jist this much about it. I've gotter be paid to keep dark—see?"

Jack looked at the speaker in dismay. Walter sank helplessly into a chair.

"I'm a detective, I am," continued the man, throwing back his coat impressively and exhibiting a shield as big as a saucer. "My name is O'Dowd, an' I want you to understand I've got ther pull. I kin railroad you two fellers or I kin keep it dark—see?"

"We hadn't anything to do with Mr. Ryman's death," gasped Walter.

"Never laid a hand on him. It was he that attacked us!" protested Jack.

"That's all right. Him an' me was in the parlor talkin' in

the dark. We heard the hull business. You two are thieves, if nothing else—see?"

"I should say you'd better see if he's dead, and call a doctor if he isn't," said Jack sullenly. "I've nothing at all to do with this business."

"Oh, yes, you have! He's dead fast enough. Besides, I don't care nothing at all about him. He sent for me to talk over the best way of finding this here young snoozer, an' we couldn't agree on terms nohow. I was jist a-goin' when this happened, for I didn't think there was no fat into the case, but now I find there's a hull pot full for a smart feller like me. If Harris Ryman is dead, there ain't anybody in New York that'll cry about it. Howsoever, we've got to have a doctor. First, though, I'll take a look myself."

He bent over the body, and the way he handled himself showed that he knew just what he was about.

"He's as dead as a door-nail," he announced. "Heart disease most likely. But if you two squint crosswise at me I'll say you slugged him. Now, then, before I call in outsiders, looker here, you——"

"Do you mean me?" gasped Jack.

"No; t'other feller."

"What do you want?" faltered Walter, who was evidently very much frightened.

"I want to tell you what to do," said the detective coolly. "With Harris Ryman dead, and that there paper in your possession, you're worth millions. Now, then, you're going to put matters in my hands—you're going to stay right here in this house and invite me to stop along with you. You ain't going to talk to nobody unless I tell you to talk, and when it's all straightened out you're going to give me one hundred thousand dollars for helping you out of such a scrape."

"Is there anything else you want?" asked Jack sarcastically.

"No. I think that will do. What's yer name?"

"Jack Willing."

"Well, then, Jack Willing, you'll stay right here while I shake up the servants and send for a doctor. Is it all agreed?"

Jack said nothing.

"Speak up, young Ryman. How is it?" demanded O'Dowd.

"I suppose you'll do as you like," muttered Walter. "I can only tell the truth."

"Kerect! It's a go!" cried O'Dowd, and pushing his hat on the back of his head he walked out of the room.

"What's to be done?" whispered Walter. "Oh, Jack, this is a terrible thing."

"Keep cool, Walter. My advice to you is to stay and face the music."

"Will you stay with me?"

"Don't ask me to do that."

"But I've got no one else to turn to. Don't desert me, Jack."

But it was too late even then to talk of going, for at the same moment Detective O'Dowd came bouncing in again with the butler and the coachman at his heels.

"He's fallen in a fit," he was saying as they entered. "Go for a doctor, one of you. Is that your wish, Mr. Ryman? You are master here."

"Go, Peter," said Walter. "If uncle's life is to be saved no time must be lost."

The opportunity to protest had come, and was lost.

Jack saw plainly enough that both he and Walter were in the clutches of the unscrupulous O'Dowd.

In less than fifteen minutes the library was full of people. The doctor, the police, the servants and the neighbors were all on hand.

To all O'Dowd told one story.

Mr. Ryman's nephew, who had been missing, had returned suddenly. The shock was too great for the millionaire, and he had fallen dead.

Heart disease, the doctor pronounced it, and he further declared that death had been instantaneous.

Meanwhile, the greatest confusion prevailed.

Everybody was talking to everybody else, and no one seemed to know what to do.

"Anyhow, you've got the paper, Walter!" whispered Jack, as they stood together in one corner of the parlor. "Have you looked at it yet? Do you know what it amounts to?"

"No; upon my word, I've been so shaken up I— Great heavens, Jack, I haven't got it! The paper's gone!"

Walter stood with his hand in his breast pocket, his face the picture of dismay.

"Gone!" echoed Jack.

"Gone, as true as you live!"

"But where could it have gone to? I saw you put it in that pocket with my own eyes."

Perhaps Jack would not have thought it quite so strange had he known that Mr. O'Dowd had been an expert pickpocket in Boston before he became a detective in New York.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK AND WALTER KICK OUT OF THE TRACES.

"By gracious, Jack, look at him! There he is, drunk again! Upon my word, Jack, he acts just as though he owned the whole house."

It was just one week after the sudden death of Harris Ryman.

Jack and Walter had been out for a stroll, and now coming in about ten o'clock, caught sight of Detective O'Dowd snoozing on the satin-covered sofa in the parlor, with a whisky bottle and a box of cigars on the table by his side.

"Looks as though he owned the whole house, and us, too, Walt. I tell you, we were the biggest kind of fools to listen to him that night."

"Guess I know it, now that it is too late," replied Walter dejectedly. "Did you see that fellow at our heels again to-night? I tell you, we have never taken a step or made a move that has not been watched."

Jack opened the hall door, and glanced across the street.

"There he is, Walt! See over there on the corner."

"I see him—shut the door. By thunder, if I could only get that paper I'd make him sick!"

"That fellow across the street?"

"No—O'Dowd, of course."

"Blame him!"

"He shook it at me only yesterday," continued Walter bitterly. "He don't deny taking it out of my pocket when all those people came crowding into the room—the thief!"

"Did he give you any idea what it says, Walt?"

"None at all. He says he can either make or break me. What do you suppose he asks now, Jack?"

"Give it up. It was \$250,000 yesterday."

"He wants a cool half million to-day."

"There is nothing small about him! It'll be a million next."

"Hush! He's waking up! Let's skip upstairs to the room," whispered Walter, who was peering through the crack of the parlor door.

But before they had time to get away Detective O'Dowd came tumbling out of the parlor.

"Here! Stop!" he cried in a mandlin way. "I've got a bone to pick with you two. You've been talking to a lawyer. You try that again and I'll make you sick. There's \$10,000,000 a-comin' here, an' I'll be blamed if you're going to cheat me out of my share."

This was interesting, but it was only a sample of what Jack and Walter had been going through all the week.

From that fatal night until now Detective O'Dowd had acted precisely as though he owned the Ryman mansion and everything there was in it.

He had taken possession of the dead millionaire's chamber directly after the funeral.

When it turned out that Mr. Ryman, being a lawyer himself, employed no regular attorney, then, in Walter's name, O'Dowd engaged a notorious Tombs shyster to look after affairs.

There were no relatives but Walter.

The detective and his confederate took possession of Harris Ryman's papers, and refused to tell him the contents of the will.

When Walter protested, O'Dowd threatened to make a charge of murder against him, and another against Jack.

Of course if these boys had been anything but boys they would never have submitted to any such outrageous blackmail.

But they were boys, and so far they had submitted, for they were without money, experience or friends.

They had slipped into this snare without any trouble, but it was quite another matter to get out again.

But Jack, by this time, had become as much attached to Walter as if he had known him all his life.

Nothing would have induced him to desert Walter now.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Jack, pushing back O'Dowd, who tried to put his hand upon his shoulder. "Do you think we are nothing but a couple of slaves?"

"Blamed if I don't! That's just what you are."

"Oh, you're too drunk to know what you're talking about."

"Jack! Jack! for heaven's sake, be careful!" cried Walter beseechingly.

But it was too late. The mischief was already done.

"Drunk! Drunk! Who says I'm drunk?" roared O'Dowd.

"I say so!"

"You're a liar! I can hang you, young feller, and I'll do it if you don't look out. What do you want to take him to a lawyer for? I'm law in this house——"

Now, it might have been all right even yet, if O'Dowd had only had sense enough to keep his hands off of Jack.

But O'Dowd was drunk and ugly. He thought himself master of the situation, and on the strength of that he very foolishly slapped Jack across the face.

That settled it.

It was like touching a lighted match to dynamite.

All fear vanished in an instant.

Biff! Whack! Bang!

Jack had not studied the manly art in the French academy for nothing.

O'Dowd got one under the jaw and another in the eye before he knew where it came from.

The next moment he was sprawling on the floor with Jack on top of him.

"Go for his pockets, Walt! Go for his pockets, while I hold him down!" cried Jack. "We may as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb."

Walter was not backward about coming forward, as the saying goes.

While Jack held the struggling detective pinned to the floor, he knelt down and thrust his hand hastily in one pocket after another.

"I've got it!" he cried. "By George, here it is! The very package he stole from me!"

"Help! Murder! Help!" roared O'Dowd.

"Skip, Walt! Skip!" cried Jack.

Walter flung the front door open, and dashed out. Jack,

with a sudden bound, let go his hold on O'Dowd and darted after him.

"Stop them! Stop them!" roared the detective's voice behind them, as they went flying down the stoop.

The cry might have been heard a block away.

It was heard by the man whom the boys spotted.

Where he had been hiding they never knew, but he was right on hand.

He seemed to suddenly rise up before them and plant himself directly in their path.

"Stop! Stop, or I'll blow your brains out!" he shouted. "You don't get away from me!"

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE WALL.

Jack Willing had no more notion of being shot by this unknown foe than he had of being downed by Detective O'Dowd.

The tables were turned. O'Dowd's teeth were drawn. Walter, with the paper and Walter without were two very different persons.

Without showing the slightest hesitation, Jack flung himself upon the spy.

Bang!

Instantly a shot rang out upon the night.

Thud!

Down dropped the spy upon the sidewalk, tipped over by a blow under the chin, and Jack, with the smoking revolver in his hand, wheeled around into Twenty-ninth Street, followed by Walter, and dashed on at the top of his speed.

"By gracious, you did that slick," panted Walter. "You had the revolver out of his hand before he knew where he was."

"Just what I meant to do, my dear fellow. Don't you stop! Don't slack up a bit."

"I can't talk running, Jack. Great Scott! We're in for it now! If O'Dowd makes a charge against us we'll both be hung."

"Nonsense! I don't believe a word of it. Your uncle left a big fortune, and there must be some honest lawyer in New York willing to help you, even if the man who talked with you to-day did prove to be a snide."

"You'll stand by me, Jack?"

"Of course I will. I can't do anything to better my own affairs. I'll take old Lize's advice and help all I can in yours."

"Where are we going?"

"Blest if I know. Suppose we go back to the haunted house?"

"The very thing I was going to propose. Hark! There they come."

The sound of rapid footsteps now suddenly became audible behind them.

Looking back, Jack saw both O'Dowd and his friend coming down the street under full sail.

Both were good runners, too. They did not shout. Evidently they felt very sure of running the boys down.

Just at that moment our young friends gained Broadway.

"Stop! We can't run here!" panted Jack. "Make for a car."

A "green line" car was just passing, and the boys boarded it.

O'Dowd's eye was upon them before they could get inside the car.

Now, like many other men, Detective O'Dowd could be drunk one moment and sober the next.

"He's right on top of us!" gasped Walter.

"Never mind! We've got the start. Don't you say a word."

But the mischief had been done already, for the conductor overheard Walter's incautious remark, and sharply rang the bell.

"Get off my car, you two!" he said gruffly. "Get right off!"

"What's that for?" demanded Walter.

"Slide off, Walt! Don't stop to talk!" cried Jack.

They dropped into the street, and the car moved on.

O'Dowd and his companion were within a block of them now, and, horrible to relate, a policeman had joined them. Matters were in a decidedly bad way.

Now, the car had taken them as far as Thirtieth Street, and Jack had Walter around the corner in no time, and then they went stumbling right upon a piece of good luck in the shape of an empty hack headed toward Sixth Avenue.

The driver had stopped to adjust the pole strap, and Jack, who took in the situation at a glance, went for him with a rush.

"Say, we're being chased! I'll give you ten dollars to take us uptown, whether we are caught or not."

The driver shot one look at the panting boys.

"Cash down, and it's a go!" he said abruptly.

Jack had his money ready, and slipped it into the fellow's hand.

"Pile in!" cried the driver.

Never did two boys get into a hack any quicker.

"Take Eighth Avenue, and go on till we're stopped!" called Jack, as he slammed the door.

The hack was off at full speed in an instant, the boys sinking down on the cushions with a sigh of relief.

"Are we safe?" panted Walter.

"Don't know. Hark! Didn't you hear O'Dowd shouting?"

But if Jack had heard anything of the sort, they did not hear it again, and the hack rolled on.

In a few minutes they were on Eighth Avenue, making splendid speed uptown.

"By George, that was done slick!" cried Walter. "I don't believe he saw us at all."

"Don't be too sure," replied Jack.

"I'm being followed, gents!" called down the driver at that moment, "and by a better team than me own. What shall I do?"

"Go on as fast as you can. If they gain on you slack up a little, let us out, and then keep right on till you're overhauled."

Faster than ever went the hack, until they had crossed Fifty-ninth Street, and were running alongside the park wall.

There was nothing but vacant lots here at the time of which we write.

Eighth Avenue above Fifty-ninth Street was simply an unpaved country road.

"They're close on top of me, boss!" called the driver again. "I'm going to slack up now!"

He slackened up more effectually than he had intended, for by some blunder the forward wheel caught the car track, which stood a good foot above the road level.

The next the boys knew over went the hack on the car track, they falling on top of each other amid a crash of glass.

The wheel had been taken off at the axle as smoothly as though cut with a knife.

"Great Scott! We are done for now!" groaned Jack, who was underneath. "Get off of me, Walt! Break the other window! Get out somehow, only get out!"

Walter managed to drive his fist through the window and crawl out.

In a few seconds Jack followed, in spite of the fact that the frightened horses were dragging the vehicle.

"Hold on, there! Hold on! Don't you leave! I must be paid for this!" roared the driver, who was at the horses' heads.

"Hold those boys! They're wanted for murder!" the voice of O'Dowd was heard shouting, and another hack, drawn by two panting horses, came dashing up alongside before the boys could make a move.

"Fly, Walt! Over the park wall!" cried Jack; but they were on the wrong side of the ruined vehicle, and had to run around.

They gained the wall ahead of O'Dowd, however, but he was right after them, with the policeman and the other detective at his heels.

"I can't climb up there!" gasped Walter.

Jack seized him by the legs and lifted him up.

"Catch the wall and slide over!" he cried.

"Shoot 'em if they won't stop!" yelled O'Dowd, as Jack leaped up, caught the wall and vaulted over.

Crack!

Crack!

Two shots rang out upon the night, but no damage was done.

Then as Jack touched the ground a new danger suddenly came upon him, for a man arose up out of the shadows of the wall and seized him by the throat.

"Hold on, young feller! Hold on!" he hissed. "Not quite so fast."

CHAPTER XIII.

BACK IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

"I've got you! Don't you try to bilk at me. You've ruined me hack, so yer have, an' now I'm goin' to have me pay."

It was the hack driver, of course.

Scaling the wall at another point, he headed Jack Willing off most effectually.

And who could blame him? Very naturally the man wanted his pay.

"For heaven sake, let go of me, and I'll give you everything you want!" gasped Jack, for O'Dowd & Co. were at that very moment climbing the wall.

"Not much!"

"Don't be a fool! Will you make anything by giving me up? Help me to hide, and we'll settle this matter quick enough."

The driver "caught on," as the saying goes.

To turn Jack and Walter over to their enemies was to turn dollars out of his pocket.

"Hold on, there—hold on!" O'Dowd was shouting.

"Slide in here under this tree," whispered the driver. "They will look for you everywhere but close to the wall."

It was a good suggestion.

Walter was close beside Jack when it came, for Walter had come back—he would rather be captured with Jack than to escape alone.

Now, the tree was a stone pine, and the branches grew close down upon the ground. In among them the boys crawled, and none too soon, either, for O'Dowd was heard to drop over the wall a second later, the others following, and they came rushing up to where the driver stood.

"Here they are!" cried O'Dowd, catching sight of the driver.

"Come on, boys!"

"Did ye see 'em? Where are dey? Show 'em to me, an' I'll break the heads of the both of 'em!" cried the driver. "Sure, they're a couple of young bilks, so they are."

"Hello! Is it you?" cried O'Dowd, pausing. "You were driving the hack?"

"You bet I was, boss, but I'll never drive it again, for it's broke entirely."

"Where did they go?"

"Don't you know?"

"No. I took you for one of them. If you know you'd better tell."

"Ah! Go 'long with yer! Yer a beat like the others."

"My man, I'm an officer," cried O'Dowd, with a great show of dignity, at the same time displaying his huge shield. "If you know which way those fellows went, it will pay you to tell, I want you to understand."

"Look at that, now. It's all your doings! If you hadn't chased us me hack would niver have broke down. What's yer name? Sure somebody's got to pay the bill, an' if I can't get it out of any one else I'll go for you."

"Pshaw! You're an idiot!" growled O'Dowd. "This way, boys! He knows nothing about it. They must have run this way."

Now, only a minute was occupied by all this. The next and O'Dowd and his companions went dashing off among the trees.

"Whist! Whist! Now's our time, fellers!" breathed the driver. "I've a scheme what'll fix everything O. K. Follow me!"

He was a smart fellow that driver.

He had counted the pursuers of Jack and Walter, and he knew that the hack which brought them to the spot must now be alone.

"We'll change cars, so we will," he whispered. "This is not me own hack. I'm only on for the night. Make it twinty dollars instead of tin and off we are."

"All right!" said Jack, who was ready to sacrifice anything to escape the clutches of the rascally O'Dowd.

Now, the driver insisted upon his money in advance, and it was given to him. The boys jumped into the other carriage and away they went.

"Unless they follow on horseback we are safe enough now, Walt," said Jack, with a great sigh of relief.

"I don't know. He'll catch us sooner or later," replied Walter. "I'm afraid we've got ourselves into a terrible muss."

"You've got the papers all right?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, hold on to them. We'll have a chance to look them over by and by."

But it was difficult to talk, and little more was said until at last the vehicle came to a halt. Jack looked out of the window and saw that they were at the McComb's Dam Bridge.

"I don't want to go anny furdur!" called the driver, looking down. "I'm going to put these horses in a stable over beyant here. I don't want to get taken up."

"That's all right!" cried Jack, opening the door and jumping out.

"I've done the best I could for yer, young feller. Hope yer won't get nabbed."

"You've done first rate," replied Jack, "and I won't forget it. I hope you won't get into any trouble on our account."

"That's all right. Sure, I'm glad yous got away. If they ketch yous now it's yer own fault."

Jack and Walter felt very much the same way as they crossed the bridge and proceeded to the haunted house.

"Can they track us here? That's the point," said Jack, just as they turned in at the gate.

He did not feel very easy about it, either, for so much had he been mixed up with the police in connection with the haunted house since his arrival in New York that it seemed to him that it ought not to be difficult for any one to imagine that he would seek refuge here.

However, there was no other place to go, and Jack kept his thoughts to himself.

Everything seemed to be just as they had left it about the house.

Jack still had the key, and opening the big front door, the boys went in, bolting and locking it behind them before attempting to strike a match.

Then they went into the parlor, and Jack lighted the lamp, throwing open one of the windows, although he allowed the blinds to remain closed.

"I don't think there's a ghost of a chance of any one bothering us before morning," he said. "Now, then, Walt, out with the papers. I'm most curious to see what they are all about."

Walter produced the packet, cut the string, and spread the papers out upon the piano.

The next half hour was spent in reading them and discussing their contents, which certainly were very peculiar.

The sum and substance of the facts disclosed by the papers was to the effect that Walter was not the son of Edwin Ryman, but only an adopted child, his true name being Walter Marlowe.

This information was found in the first paper examined, and Walter's spirits fell accordingly.

The next paper served to raise them again, however, for it proved to be the will of Edwin Ryman, bequeathing to Walter Marlowe, his adopted son, all his vast wealth, especially stating that Harris Ryman, the testator's brother, was to have nothing whatever to do with the handling of the estate.

"Good!" cried Jack. "I understand this, Walter. Everything is yours. No wonder O'Dowd's talk of blackmail was big. But what's this paper about? It seems to be in Latin. I ought to be able to read it, but I'll be blest if I can make out more than one word or two here and there."

"Never mind; we'll find out sooner or later," said Walter. "Oh, Jack! I am wild with excitement. Just think how rich I shall be! I tell you, old fellow, you shall be paid up for all you have done for me."

"Oh, nonsense! Don't talk like that. Anyhow, I shall be glad your affairs are likely to be straightened out, Walt. As for mine—— Hark! What was that?"

Outside a footstep was heard crossing the piazza, and suddenly the blind slats were turned.

"Fly! Fly to the haunted room!" croaked the voice of old Lize, whose wrinkled face could be distinctly seen peering in upon them. "They are after you, boys! Lock the window and put out the light!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BESIEGED.

"Hark! Thunderation! They'll break that door down as sure as fate!"

The exclamation was well put, for the noise on the door below was thundering, indeed. If it stood up against such blows as had been showered upon it during the last ten minutes, it certainly was a much better specimen of a door than carpenters are accustomed to construct nowadays.

"Open up, here! Open up, if you know what's good for you!" roared the voice of O'Dowd.

The boys leaned over the banisters, breathlessly listening.

They had put the light out on the instant, calling to Lize for further information.

But they did not get it.

Lize, following her usual mysterious fashion, had vanished.

It was too late in the day to question the prophecies of this strange old creature now, for they had in each instance come out true to the letter.

Jack accordingly locked the window, and the boys re-

treated upstairs to the haunted chamber, taking the lamp with them, but having no other light to guide them than the moonbeams which fell through the skylight.

"What shall we do?" breathed Walter. "I don't want to go into that confounded room in the dark."

"Neither do I," answered Jack. "What's more, I ain't any time. Hark! By George, Lize was right again. There they are!"

It was then that the knocking on the door began, and it had not stopped yet.

The bell was also rung again and again, and the boys could hear some one trying window after window on the lower floor, all of which most fortunately were securely fastened down.

Now, had it not been for the piazza roof, the boys might have looked out and gained some idea of the attacking force.

This, however, they could not do.

Here they were besieged in the haunted house, and what to do about it they did not know.

"They are bound to get in sooner or later," breathed Walter.

"I'm afraid so. I don't see what good being in the haunted room would do us then."

"Hush! There goes the glass in the parlor window! It's all up, Jack! They'll be down on us in one minute."

A frightful crash was heard below. The knocking on the door had immediately ceased.

"There they are—there they come!" breathed Jack. "Hear them! There must be three in already."

"Hello, there! If you're in this house, Jack Willing, you'd better answer up!" roared the voice of O'Dowd at the foot of the stairs.

At the same instant a light was flashed up, the boys scarcely having time to dodge back from the banisters and through the door of the haunted room.

"Hold on, there! I saw you, you blamed little snoozer!" bawled O'Dowd. "It's no use for you to try to dodge! I made sure I'd catch you here!"

He came bounding upstairs as he spoke, but arrived just in time to be too late, for Jack had turned the key in the door of the haunted room.

"As though this would help us any!" whispered Jack. "They will break in here, too, and—— What are you pulling my arm for, Walt?"

"Never touched you!" breathed Walter.

"Yes, you did! Say——"

"Hush! It is me. Come!"

"Lize!" gasped Jack, recognizing the voice, although he could distinguish nothing.

"Yes, Lize! Come! Come!"

"They must have gone in here!" yelled O'Dowd's voice in the passage. "Bust the door in, boys."

Even if Jack had been disposed to question Lize there was no time for argument.

He could feel the old hag pulling at his arm, and he simply followed.

"Slide in through here! Go sideways!" whispered Lize, as the thumping and banging began on the door of the haunted room.

Now, Jack had not the faintest idea where he was going—as for Walter, he simply followed Jack.

Suddenly something clicked, and a light flashed up. The boys found themselves standing in a space so narrow that there was scarcely a chance to turn. Old Lize was beside them. In her hand she held a curious little lamp. She put her finger to his lips, as Jack was about to speak, cautioning him to keep silent.

And, indeed, there was noise enough without Jack.

They heard the door come crashing in, and O'Dowd and the others burst into the haunted chamber.

The racket which followed was tremendous.

Certain of finding his game in this particular room, O'Dowd raised the tallest kind of ructions when he discovered that the boys were not there.

Meanwhile, Lize had put the light out, and all stood breathlessly waiting.

"I'll have 'em, if I have to search New York from one end to the other!" Jack heard O'Dowd declare at last. "One thing is certain, though, boys, they didn't come to this house after all. We've been deceived."

Shortly after this O'Dowd & Co. were heard retreating downstairs.

"They've gone, Walt!" breathed Jack. "They didn't see us after all. It was only a bluff."

"I hear them, old man."

"Lize!" whispered Jack. "Oh, Lize!"

There was no answer.

Jack felt around for the old hag, but caught Walter's arm.

"Where's Lize?" he breathed.

"I don't know! Ain't she on the other side of you?" asked Walter.

"No."

"But she must be here somewhere! Lize! Lize!"

Still no answer.

Jack struck a match and looked around.

More mystery.

Lize had vanished, and yet there was no apparent opening to the narrow space in which they stood.

Just then they heard the front door close.

The siege was over.

Jack struck a match and tried to discover the way by which he had entered.

As far as he could see there was no opening of any kind.

CHAPTER XV.

WALTER IN TROUBLE.

"They've gone, Jack!"

"I know it, Walt, but how the mischief are we to get out of this?"

"Just what I'm beginning to wonder. Bless my soul! That Lize is a very mystery of mysteries. How do you suppose she got out?"

"Same way she got in, I guess," laughed Jack.

"But, look here! One moment she's outside the window, the next she's in this room. How did she get into the house when all the doors and windows were locked? Where is she now?"

But the boys both felt that they might go right on speculating about Lize to all eternity, and then not arrive at any conclusion.

As there could be no doubt that O'Dowd and his gang had left the premises, the main thing now was to get out of their confinement as soon as they possibly could.

This, however, was easier said than done.

For a good ten minutes they kept pounding the walls and running their hands up and down, in search of some hidden spring, when all of a sudden the narrow door flew open, they knew not how or why, and there was a free passage into the haunted chamber.

Jack and Walter lost no time in making the most of it, and they hurried out.

"Just as I thought," cried Jack, when he had found the lamp and lighted it. "We were in behind the chimney! By George! I begin to smell a rat."

"What do you mean?"

"Secret panels may explain the ghosts."

"I don't see how it can explain a dozen ghosts in half length at dinner, then. You remember what you told me, Jack."

"Yes, and it was all true. Hold on! We must be sure that O'Dowd has actually gone before we make a move."

They stole downstairs to reconnoiter, finding to their intense relief and satisfaction that they had the house to themselves.

Of course the boys now fell to discussing the situation. How could it be expected that they would do otherwise?

After some delay they closed the door, and returning to the haunted chamber went to work to explore the mysteries of the hidden panel.

This they had left open, and they found it as they had left it. With the light to aid them, there was not so much difficulty now, and Jack, after a very brief examination of the narrow compartment behind the chimney, discovered that the whole floor formed a trap door, which, after a little trouble, he managed to raise, disclosing a narrow flight of stairs, leading down into regions unknown.

"There! What did I tell you?" he exclaimed. "Now, then, Walt, if you've got half the courage I give you credit for, we'll soon know more about these ghosts."

"Are you going to venture down?"

"You bet I am."

Walter shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know about that," he said. "Don't you think you had better let sleeping dogs lie?"

"Not while there's a chance to penetrate the mysteries of this house. Remember, old fellow, there's a missing man——"

"More than one."

"Yes; but I refer to Mr. Butterman. If what I saw was real, and no dream, then Mr. Butterman is still alive, and confined somewhere in this mysterious house of mine. If I can only find him, there's no telling what may come of it. Besides, there's Edith, and—anyhow, I'm going down whether you do or not."

"Oh, I'll go wherever you do," replied Walter very decidedly. "Don't you think I'm going to back out now?"

Jack turned down the lamp as low as he possibly could, and still have any light, and they stole down the secret stairs.

The distance to the bottom was longer than he had expected—about three times as long as the regular stairs of the old mansion. Therefore, Jack knew that they must be lower than the cellar when at last the end was reached, and the boys paused at the entrance to a narrow passage, very similar to the one which Jack had seen in his dream.

"By gracious! I've been here before, Walt!" whispered Jack. "I remember this place perfectly, and——"

"Hark!"

"Music, by gracious! Walt, they're at it again!"

"What do you mean?"

"The dancing party! It was no dream."

"There's some one playing the piano on ahead here, that's sure."

"Come on! Come on!" breathed Jack. "Slow and easy now, old fellow. We don't want to get caught."

But really there seemed to be no danger of this, for though they kept a sharp lookout ahead, they could not see a soul.

The further they advanced along the passage the louder the music became, until at last it seemed to be right alongside of them, and there ahead was the end of the passage up against the rough stone wall.

"This is the place," whispered Jack, pointing to a door on the right. "There's the door—there's the peep-hole. Keep as still as a mouse, Walt. I'm going to have a look inside. Here, put the lamp behind you so that there'll be no chance of the light being seen."

There was no danger of this, however, for when Jack gently raised the panel just far enough to enable him to get a glimpse of the room beyond, a flash of light shot forth.

It was the same room, and there were the same people in it.

There was Mr. Buttermann, Mrs. Grassland and Edith, Harry Halstead, the detective, and many others whom Jack did not know.

They were going through the same performances as Jack had seen in his supposed dream.

Harry Halstead was dancing with a pretty girl, Edith was playing, Mr. Buttermann and Mrs. Grassland was chatting on the sofa—all just the same.

Then Walter had a look and he saw the same things, too.

"Thunder! This is very remarkable!" he breathed when, having closed the panel, he turned to speak to Jack.

But a great surprise awaited Walter.

To his amazement and horror Jack was no longer there.

"Jack! Jack!" he breathed, louder than was prudent. "Where are you, Jack?"

He stooped to pick up the lamp, which stood upon the floor, and when he straightened up again there was a new surprise awaiting him.

Standing directly before the door of the mysterious room was a tall man apparently of great age, with a long beard as white as snow.

"Who are you?" he demanded, fixing his eyes upon Walter. "Who are you that dares to intrude into my private apartments? Young man, you are not the first who for such rashness has paid the penalty with his life."

CHAPTER XVI.

STRANGE ADVENTURES UNDERGROUND.

Walter stared at the ghost

We say ghost, for the reason that the tall, white-headed figure which had so suddenly appeared before the boy filled the description of the ghost given by Jack in every particular.

Walter could not doubt for an instant that it was the same man.

Walter was frightened, yet triumphant.

He had never believed in the ghost, and had said so.

But where was Jack? Had this dreadful man made away with the poor fellow?

"By gracious, I'd better be careful," he thought. "I must speak to him fair."

But when he tried to speak he found himself unable to say a word.

Why?

That Walter could not tell.

When he opened his mouth with the intention of speaking not a sound could he utter. All he could do was to gaze at those terrible eyes.

A curious smile passed over the face of the old man.

"Well, boy, why don't you speak?" he said in a deep bass voice.

Again Walter opened his mouth, gasping like a fish, but there was no sound.

"Speak!"

He heard the command as though coming from a distance—his senses seemed to be slipping away from him. Then suddenly all this changed, and Walter found himself with all his senses restored.

A strange calmness seemed to come over him. It seemed, also, as though he had known the old man all his life.

"Who are you?" demanded the old man in a milder tone.

"My name is Walter Ryman."

"Walter—Ryman! Humph! I do not know you. Why are you here?"

"I came here with Jack Willing!"

To save himself Walter could not help answering as he did.

"Jack Willing! That is the young man who was here a moment ago."

"Yes."

"Why did you come here?"

"We found the secret door."

"Stop! You do not tell the truth. You could not have found the secret door unaided. Who told you where it was?"

"An old woman named Lize showed us one door. We found the other ourselves."

"Lize! Ah! Ten thousand maledictions on that old hag! Where is she now?"

"I don't know."

"Do you know any reason why I should not kill you both for meddling with what does not concern you? Boy, follow me!"

To this Walter made no answer—he could make none. Again all power of speech seemed to have been taken from him.

The old man started along the corridor toward its end, Walter followed.

Meanwhile, the music had started up again, and he could hear the sound of many voices proceeding from the mysterious room.

But this was only for a moment. Reaching the end of the corridor Walter perceived an opening in the wall which he had not seen before.

The old man stood aside and pointed through.

"Enter!" he said commandingly.

As meekly as a child, Walter obeyed.

Instantly a great upright stone glided across the opening behind him.

All was dark now save for a solitary glimmer which shone at the bottom of a flight of steps directly in front of him.

The old man had disappeared.

"Great heavens! What does all this mean?" gasped Walter, leaning against the wall and staring around.

He felt as though a great weight had suddenly been removed from his brain. Instead of that sense of calmness he now found himself seized with a horrible fear.

Should he descend the steps?

For a moment he hesitated, the next and he saw some one coming up. It was a man; Walter could not distinguish his features—only his figure. He drew back against the wall in an agony of fear, resolved to defend himself to the last.

On came the figure, each step he ascended increasing the boy's terror, until at last he lost all self-control.

"Keep back!" he shouted. "Keep back! Don't you lay a hand on me!"

"Great Scott! That you, Walt?" suddenly called a welcome voice.

It was Jack.

Walter leaned back against the wall, almost too faint to speak.

"Jack! Jack! Oh, Jack!" he gasped, and in a moment Jack was at his side.

"There! There, old fellow! Brace up! 'Tain't so bad but we may come out all right. Did he get hold of you, too?"

"Oh, Jack! Jack!"

"Hush! Don't shake so! There's nothing to be afraid of for a few minutes, anyhow. He is not here."

"That frightful old man?"

"Of course. Did he catch you, too, Walt?"

"Jack, I don't know what he did to me."

"Same here, Walt. He got his eyes on me, and they seemed

to suck me right through the wall, as it were. Did he say anything to you?"

"Did he—well, I should say he did! What did he say to you, Jack?"

"Not a word."

"What?"

"It's just as I tell you. When you started to look through the peep-hole, I turned around, and there he was. The next thing I knew I was in here."

Walter groaned.

"Oh, Jack! We've got ourselves into terrible trouble, I am afraid."

"There! There! Don't take it so hard. We're in for it, and must do the best we can. What did he say to you, Walt?"

Walter related his experience.

Somehow Jack's presence seemed to give him courage. He was quite himself by the time he had related all there was to tell.

"Blest if it ain't the strangest thing I ever saw," muttered Jack. "Why, I was just like putty when that old fellow's eyes were upon me, and with you, Walt, it seems to have been just the same."

"Worse."

"Not a bit worse. My case is the worst if anything, for he didn't speak to me at all, and yet I walked straight in here. He must be a mesmerist, Walt."

"Blest if I don't think he is a magician. Anyhow, he's no ghost."

"That's sure. But, say, Walt! Now we're here let's make the most of it. There's a big mystery hanging over this house, and the old fellow is evidently at the bottom of it. Let's see what we can find out?"

"You've been downstairs, Jack. What did you find?"

"Nothing. I only went a little way. Do you suppose I was going to leave you without an effort to get back? Not much."

"I suppose there is no use trying——"

"To get back through this?" cried Jack, striking his fist against the stone. "Not a bit of it. I tried that. Come on! Let's go downstairs and see what we can find. We might discover some way out of this strange place."

But they did not.

Descending the stairs, they found themselves standing at the entrance to another corridor, which seemed to run directly beneath the one they had just left.

The walls and floor were of stone, but the ceiling was of wood. At the foot of the stairs a small hanging lamp hung suspended from a beam, shedding a fitful light upon the strange scene.

In a few moments the boys were back at the foot of the stairs again, no wiser than when they had started out. They had penetrated to the end of the corridor without discovering a break of any sort in the wall.

"This is a great note," muttered Jack. "Of course he don't intend to leave us here forever. What's to be done, Walt?"

"Don't ask me, Jack. I can't tell you."

Jack drew a long breath. "I tell you what it is, Walt, you and I have disappeared like all the rest. That's the long and short of it, now you may depend."

"I'm blest if it don't look so."

"It is so. I—— Hark! What's that?"

"Some one coming along the corridor."

"Sure! Hush! Keep cool, now! Whatever happens we don't want to show ourselves afraid."

But it was easier said than done.

The boys backed against the wall under the hanging lamp, and waited.

"Heavens and earth! What kind of a thing is that?" gasped Walter, as the light fell upon the approaching figure.

"Hush! It's only a mask!" breathed Jack. "No such baby business as that is going to frighten me."

Certainly it was a mask—it could have been nothing else—and yet, seen in that dim light, under such circumstances, the boys could scarcely have been blamed for being a bit rattled.

From the shoulders down the approaching figure was that of a man. Pulled over his head was the strangest mask imaginable. It was the head of an enormous bird.

"You want to follow me, young gentlemen," said the figure in a deep, sepulchral voice.

No sooner had the figure spoken, than it turned and retreated along the corridor, leaving Jack and Walter to follow or not, as they pleased.

"Are you going?" asked Walter in a whisper.

"You bet! What else can we do? I mean to see this thing through to the end."

Then Jack started, and Walter followed.

The figure, meanwhile, had never looked back to see whether they were coming, nor did it speak again, but before the boys had gone three feet some one else spoke:

"Be brave, boys! Do what you are told to do, but eat nothing—drink nothing!"

"Heavens! Who spoke?" gasped Walter, suddenly stopping.

They looked behind them, but could see no one.

The voice, however, had, seemingly, come from above.

It was the voice of the woman, Lize!

CHAPTER XVII.

IMPRISONED WITH A CORPSE.

"Enter, young gentlemen. Let us live while we live, and be happy while we may. Eat, drink, and be merry. Walk in."

It was the mask who spoke now.

He bowed his bird's head low before them, for he had opened a door at the end of a corridor, and a flood of light streamed forth.

Now, in a twinkling, everything had changed.

Vanished were the surroundings of the previous moment. The boys saw before them a broad staircase covered with a rich carpet, with polished rails and a cluster of colored globes hanging from the ceiling above, within each of which a bright light burned, the combination of colors producing a most peculiar effect.

At the foot of the stairs stood the darky who had admitted Jack to the house on the evening of his call upon Mrs. Grassland and Edith.

He also bowed, and without speaking motioned upward, with just the faintest suspicion of a smile upon his dusky face.

"Are we to go upstairs?" asked Jack, determined under circumstances to keep perfectly cool.

There was no answer.

The darky made another bow, and waved his hand again.

"Why don't you speak?" demanded Jack.

Still there was no answer.

As solemn as an owl, the darky stood there motioning up the stairs.

"Shall we go up, Walt?" whispered Jack.

"I suppose we might as well. We can't stay here. See, that masked fellow has gone."

"By George, so he has! But where? He shut the door behind him."

"Doors seem to make no difference here."

"That's a fact. Lead on, cully! We'll follow."

But without moving a muscle of his face, the man simply repeated his bow and wave of the hand.

Jack burst out laughing.

There was something so ridiculously theatrical about all this that he could not help it, for Jack was by nature one of those happy fellows who always saw the comical side of everything.

"Come on, Walt!" he exclaimed. "We may as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb. We'll see this thing out."

Up they went, finding themselves standing before a door when they reached the head of the stairs.

Here another darky was stationed. He was in full dress like his companion below, and approached the boys with a respectful bow.

"How are you?" said Jack, nodding. "Are you dumb, too?"

It would seem that he was, for there was no answer.

Throwing open the door, the darky motioned to the boys to enter.

Before them now lay the room which they had seen through the peep-hole.

There was Edith at the piano; there was the same merry dancers; there was Mrs. Grassland, Mr. Buttermen, and the rest.

With the same assurance that he had resolved to maintain, Jack Willing walked boldly into the brilliantly lighted salon, when in a twinkling all vanished, and he found himself standing at the foot of the stone steps, beneath the hanging lamp, just where he had been when the man with bird's-head mask first appeared.

Jack gave a quick gasp and stared around.

There was Walter beside him, rubbing his eyes and staring, too.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" he ejaculated. "What's the matter, Jack? Where is it? Where have they all gone to? What struck us now?"

But Jack found himself so strangely affected that he could scarcely speak.

"Walter, this is a most wonderful thing."

"It beats me, Jack."

"It knocks me silly. Did I go into that room, or didn't I?"

"Well, I don't know what you did, but I declare I did, Jack."

"And in spite of all that, it's very evident that neither of us did. It beats me! I give it up!"

"Hush!" breathed Jack. "Some one is coming again! By thunder, if it's that masked fellow, I'll soon know whether he's real or not."

But it was not the mask this time.

Instead, the boys saw the old man approaching along the corridor.

He came slowly, with bowed head, never raising his eyes until he was close upon them.

The boys were too much overawed to speak.

"Young men, follow me!" he said solemnly, when within about three feet of Jack and Walter, at the same time pressing his hand against the wall and flinging open a door which Jack could see was only wood, although painted to look like stone.

It was no use to attempt to disobey, for his eyes were upon them—those terrible eyes whose slightest glance seemed to possess the power of making all obey the will of the strange being.

The boys followed him through the door, along a passage running at right angles with the one they had left, until at length they were ushered into a room furnished in Oriental style, with heavy hangings all about the walls, cushions, expensive rugs and the skins of animals being thrown about the floor, a superb hanging lamp of colored glass shedding a soft, mellow light upon all.

The instance the boys passed the door the hangings fell behind them. Now the walls looked precisely the same all

around the room, with no trace of either door or window to be seen.

"Sit down," said the man, flinging himself upon a large bear-skin rug. "Sit down; I want to talk with you."

"Where shall we sit?" asked Jack.

"Anywhere. Take those cushions."

He pointed toward two handsome cushions nearly opposite to the place he had himself chosen. Upon these the boys seated themselves, wondering what was coming next.

For a moment the old man gazed at them fixedly; then reaching behind him, he produced a curious-looking pipe, which he proceeded to light, and began puffing out great wreaths of smoke.

"Which of you is Jack Willing?" he asked suddenly.

"That's my name," replied Jack.

"You are mistaken. It is not your name."

"It's the only name I know anything about."

"You are mistaken. I tell you, you are no more Jack Willing than this young man is Walter Ryman. You are brothers; your name is—oh, God! Ah! It has come at last! Death! Death! This is death!"

He clapped his hand upon his heart, these exclamations coming almost with a shriek. He tried to rise, but fell back upon the bear-skin rug. The pipe dropped from his hand, his head fell forward upon his breast. Swaying for a moment, he dropped backward, and all was still.

"Great heavens, Jack! The man is dying!" breathed Walter.

So suddenly had it all come upon them that the boys never made a move, but now Jack sprang up and ran to his side.

"What's the matter? Are you sick? Speak!" he shouted.

There was no answer.

The closing eyes and ghostly whiteness which now came over the face told the tale.

Dying the man certainly was. Dead he surely would be in a moment unless something could be done to help him.

Jack looked around for water, but could see none.

"What can we do, Walt?" he cried.

"Nothing."

"But we must!"

"It's no use. He is dead already. It's heart disease. Father went just the same way. I tell you, Jack, he's dead."

Nor could there be much doubt about it, for when Jack seized the old man's hand he found that the clenched fingers had already begun to stiffen. Moreover, the expression on his face was unmistakably that of death.

"We want to get out of here," cried Jack.

"We must find somebody. Great Scott, Walt! This gets worse and worse!"

"Did you hear what he said, Jack—that we were brothers?"

"You bet I did!"

"Do you believe it?"

"Walt, I don't know. We certainly look alike, and since I know absolutely nothing about myself, it might be true. But let's find the door, old fellow. This is too much for me. I—by gracious! Where is the door?"

Jack was busy pulling the heavy hangings away from the wall while speaking, but nothing but solid stone was visible.

They tried it here, there, everywhere—all around the room, but it was useless.

They could not find the door.

Everywhere the wall seemed solid.

Were they imprisoned with a corpse?

CHAPTER XVIII.

STARTLING DISCOVERIES.

"Jack, are you there?"

"Right here, Walt! You have been asleep."

"So have you."

"Not much. I have been watching you this last half hour."

"And I watched you over an hour."

"Which means that we've both been asleep. Great Scott! I wish we might stay asleep till some way out of this dreadful snap opened up."

Walter staggered to his feet, for he had been stretched out upon one of the thick Persian rugs which covered the floor of the mysterious chamber.

"It's there still, Jack," he whispered. "Heavens! If we only didn't have to look at it."

"Which I can't help to save me, Walt."

"Same with me. It's horrible! Do you suppose he's our father, Jack?"

Hours had passed, and the boys still found themselves imprisoned with the corpse in the mysterious chamber.

Long before all doubt that death had actually come to their strange companion had vanished, for the body had grown cold and the limbs rigid.

Jack had thrown a covering over the face, for he could not bear to look at it.

Every effort to find the door by which they came into the room had thus far failed.

Thus the hours had been hours of agony.

Worn out by fatigue and anxiety, the boys both slept, although each had been firm in his determination to keep awake.

"Walt, I don't know," answered Jack, in reply to Walter's question. "I own I've thought of this, although I didn't like to say it. Admitting that he spoke the truth when he said that we were brothers, I can hardly believe he can be our father—he's too old."

"You imagine that beard off his face, and you bear a certain resemblance to him, Jack."

"Well, I can't say that I agree with you there, but the same thing struck me about you, Walt."

"Oh, there it is! No one can deny that we look alike. Even O'Dowd noticed it and spoke to me about it. Bless my soul, how hungry I am! I feel as though I hadn't eaten anything in a month."

And Walter began pacing up and down the room like some caged animal, while Jack, who was still sleepy, lay back again upon the rug and closed his eyes.

Did he sleep?

Perhaps so. He never knew. If not actually asleep he was pretty near it, when all at once he was startled by a wild laugh which rang out through the room.

It was Walter.

"Come, come! Wake up, there! Wake up!" he was shouting. "Wake up and have a drink!"

He stood before Jack holding a small decanter in one hand and a glass in the other. In the decanter was a dark, reddish liquid which looked like wine.

Jack was on his feet in an instant, seized with a deadly terror.

The strange words heard in the corridor came back to him with a rush.

"Eat nothing—drink nothing," the voice had said. The voice was that of the woman Lize, and Lize had always hit the truth.

"Put it down! Put it down! Have you forgotten?" cried Jack. "For heaven's sake, don't drink any of that, Walt."

"Don't drink it! Why, it's splendid! I've drank three glasses already. Where have all those people gone—the room was full of them a moment ago?"

Jack heard this with added horror. With a quick movement, he snatched at the decanter, which Walter tried to retain. In the struggle it fell to the floor, its contents running out upon the rug.

"There! Now see what you have done!" cried Walter. "No

matter! Ha, ha, ha! I feel fine! Listen! Don't you hear music, Jack? Ah, here they come! Here they come! Stand aside, Jack! Give them room to pass."

"Oh, Walter, what have you done?" moaned Jack. "Can't you see there's no one here but ourselves?"

"No one here! You must be mad! The room is full of people. How do you do, sir? How do you do? What's that you say? Open the door? Why, certainly. Anything to oblige!"

He did not speak like an intoxicated person, nor did he stagger.

To Jack's amazement, he walked over to one side of the room, and pulling away the hangings, stooped down and began fumbling about the wall.

Suddenly a portion of the stone work moved back, revealing a narrow passage, scarcely high enough to enable a man to pass standing upright.

Without hesitation, Walter crawled through this and disappeared.

"Walter! Walter!" called Jack, rushing forward.

There was no answer.

Beyond the opening a light could be seen, and Jack lost no time in passing through.

A scene so singular, so improbable, met his gaze that he almost hesitate to describe it, yet it must be done.

It was a large room in which Jack now found himself—a room fully fifty feet long, and at least twenty feet in width.

Through the middle ran a tank filled with water, occupying perhaps two-thirds the length and half the width of the room, and surrounded by a low fence about four feet high.

Against the walls here and there around this tank were couches, over which heavy rugs were spread.

Upon several of these couches persons were lying—here a man, there a woman. A hanging lamp, similar to the one in the room behind, shed a mellow light upon the scene.

Of course Jack looked for Walter first of all. He saw that he had flung himself down upon one of the couches.

His eyes were wide open. A curious expression had come over his face. When Jack spoke to him he just put out his hand, making a motion as though to push him away.

"Let me alone!" he murmured. "Don't you see where I am? Beautiful! Beautiful! Oh, this is Paradise! Go away and let me alone."

It was no use to say more. Even the hearty shake which Jack gave the boy was of no avail. Raise him he could not, and curiosity impelled Jack to leave him alone and examine further into this singular place.

He now made the circuit of the tank, examining the faces of all the persons stretched upon the couches, all of whom seemed to be in similar condition to Walter.

It is no use to say that Jack was astonished as he looked upon the faces of the sleepers, for he was not. He had expected something of the sort the moment he entered the room.

Here was Mr. Buttermann—the missing man whose strange disappearance had been the forerunner of all these singular happenings. Here was Harry Halstead; here was Mrs. Grassland and Edith, and others whom Jack did not know. Altogether, there were ten of these strange sleepers, without counting Walter.

Just at this moment a tremendous splashing was heard in the tank.

Of course Jack turned and looked down into it over the fence.

If there was any chance for further amazement after all he had seen, now was the time for it, for there, moving about the tank, was a hideous black form. Jack could not quite believe his eyes.

It was there, though.

Now it turned its huge, scaly body, and blinking its little

beady eyes wickedly, flung back its huge jaw, displaying glittering teeth innumerable.

It was a great crocodile—a veritable monster of his kind. For an instant it remained staring at Jack, and then sank beneath the water out of sight.

Jack stood speechless. A cold shudder passed over him from head to foot, but before he had time to think a deep groan behind him had seized his attention.

Turning, he beheld Harry Halstead sitting upright upon the couch staring at him.

"Jack Willing! Great heavens! Jack Willing!" he muttered in a dazed way. "Oh, save me! Save me from this dreadful place."

"Mr. Halstead!" gasped Jack.

"Yes, yes! All there is left of me. If you know the way out, for heaven sake tell me before the craze for that infernal drug comes on me again."

"But I don't. I only wish I did."

"Oh, the fiends seize that old wretch! So you're another victim. Come! Come! Follow me. I must have another drink. It's no use! I must."

He sprang up, and clutching Jack's wrist, drew him to the end of the room where there was a door.

"No, no! I can't leave Walter!" protested Jack.

But the young detective did not seem to hear him.

Flinging open the door, he pulled Jack into a large room beyond.

Instantly the boy recognized it as the elegantly furnished salon which he had several times seen, only to have it vanish again like a dream.

But it was dimly lighted now, and deserted save for themselves.

Pulling Jack across the room to a handsomely carved sideboard, Harry Halstead clutched at a decanter, and was about to pour out a portion of its contents into a glass, when suddenly a strange figure seemed to rise at his very feet.

It was old Lize.

Where she had come from, unless, indeed, she had crawled out from under the sideboard, Jack could not guess.

"No more! Drink no more!" she hissed, snatching the decanter from the hand of the young detective, and dashing it to the floor. "I let you fall into this trap, young man, because you insulted me, but now I would save you! Be a man! Follow me!"

CHAPTER XIX.

OLD LIZE TELLS A STRANGE STORY.

"Lize!" gasped Jack, starting away.

"Yes, Lize!" cried the woman. "It is all over now. The old boy is dead, and now we may dance. Never again will those eyes of his make fools of the wise. Come, come! Let us escape while we may, for there are those who would kill us—those who are worse than he."

Jack jumped at the chance.

"Look here, you seem to know everything about this strange place," he exclaimed. "I'm only too glad to go with you, but I can't leave Walter behind."

"Impossible. It is his first dose. I warned you! He may sleep for hours, perhaps days. In time it would not affect him that way, but now he is wholly unconscious. We must leave him there until we can return with those who will put a stop to this evil business forever. Why, some of those you saw sleeping in yonder room have been in this place for years."

"She is right, Willing!" gasped the detective, who was hold-

ing his head between his hands. "Old woman, I apologize! Get me out of here, and there's nothing I won't do for you."

"I do it for the sake of these boys—not for yours," sneered Lize. "We will go now."

"Yes, yes! Now—now, while I can control myself. Once let me get a whiff of fresh air, and the craving for that infernal drug will pass."

"What is the drug?" asked Jack. "It can't be opium—"

"No, no! It's worse than opium," said Lize. "It is the East Indian bhang. Few know it in this country. But before we go I want to speak."

"Can't you speak afterward?" cried Halstead. "I shall go mad in a minute and jump into the crocodile tank! I know I shall!"

"Then you would not be the first madman in this strange place," said Lize solemnly. "No, I will not make a move until I have disclosed all, for I may never live to reach the open air again, and then this poor boy would never know the truth."

"Tell your story, quick, then, for heaven sake!" groaned Halstead, pacing up and down. "Oh, my head! My head!"

"Tell it, Lize," said Jack reassuringly. "I trust entirely to you."

"I shall tell as much as I like, and no more," replied Lize. "I have no more love for long yarns than any one else, but I will say my say. Jack Willing, know me now for what I am. I am your blood relation. That old wretch who lies dead in yonder room is my brother. Your father was his son."

"Then he is my grandfather!" cried Jack.

"Hush, hush! Not so loud! Yes, it is so. He was wicked, but he was also mad—he was mad. Listen!"

"I'm listening. Tell me his name."

"John Marlowe."

"Ah! The name in the paper left by Walter's adopted father. Then Walter—"

"Is your brother."

"He told the truth."

"Did he tell you that?"

"He did. He was about to tell more when he suddenly pressed his hand to his heart and died."

"Then it worked as I supposed it would. I was determined that you boys should come here, for I thought once he saw you he would give you your rights. Do you know how long he has lived this way?"

"No—how should I?"

"Hurry! Oh, hurry!" groaned Halstead. "You are not telling your story at all."

"But I will," answered Lize. "The secret of this place may be told in a few words. My brother was born rich, and, I believe, born half mad. To put it at its mildest, in the language of the day, he would be called a crank. I declare he was the worst crank who ever breathed.

"Years ago he went to Egypt to study magic, for it was in that direction that his peculiarity ran. To me he has often explained that magic and mesmerism are the same thing. I neither know nor care whether that is true or not, but this much I do know—John Marlowe went crazy on mesmerism. You have seen strange things in this house, my boy. Do you know how you were made to believe that you saw them, when you actually saw nothing of the sort?"

"I suppose you mean that he mesmerized me?"

"I mean this. So expert did he become that he could make me believe that he saw anything merely by fixing his eyes upon the person he desired to control."

"It's so!" cried Halstead. "I can swear to it. He did it to me!"

"And so can Mrs. Grassland—so can Edith, her daughter—so can others here—so can I," continued Lize. "John Marlowe owned this house, and when he returned from Egypt twenty

years ago, he fitted up these underground rooms. Why, do you suppose?"

"Go on, go on!" cried the detective.

"Because he was mad on this hobby and another," Lize went on. "He wanted full swing to exercise his mesmeric powers. Moreover, he had come to believe in the ridiculous religious notions of the ancient Egyptians, who worshipped the crocodile, among other beasts. It is hard to believe these things, yet they are true.

"Of course he was mad, yet there was method in his madness. He has been for years writing on a book treating of these matters. It is the use of this drug that drove him mad and kept him mad. This is the whole secret of this place. The crocodile out there he brought from Egypt with him. It was young then, but now——"

"Oh, never mind about that!" exclaimed Jack. "Tell me about myself."

"There is little to tell about you," replied the woman. "Your father died suddenly when you were a mere baby. Walter is your twin brother; your mother died in giving you birth. Not wishing to be burdened with babies, my brother gave you to a friend in England to take charge of, and at the same time placed Walter in charge of Mr. Ryman, who was your father's friend. Money was placed in the hands of Mr. Butterman for your support, but in Walter's case this was not necessary, for Mr. Ryman was already rich, and promised to make the boy his heir."

"Which he did," said Jack.

"I know it. I have watched the boy always."

"But——"

"Wait! One word more. My brother about that time led the world to believe that he was dead. He caused his own death notice to be published. Actually, he shut himself in the underground apartments, where I lived with him for a long time, for I, like himself, had become a slave to the drug. At last I broke away and swore I would never touch it again. Since then I have wandered about until——"

"It's no use; I can stand it no longer!" cried Harry Halstead. "We must start now or I shall go mad myself."

"Let us go, then. There is but little left to tell," answered Lize, as she led the way across the room, pushing aside a curtain in one corner and disclosing a door.

"We cannot escape by the way you came," she whispered. "Do not fancy my brother lived alone here with these victims, whom from time to time he inveigled into his den that he might practice his strange power upon them. There are those in this place whom he paid most liberally. They will prevent our escape if possible, but there is a way."

"Then for heaven's sake, show it to us!" said Jack. "I feel as Mr. Halstead feels. If this thing keeps up much longer I shall go mad, too."

But Lize, instead of answering, opened the door. Beyond was a narrow passage bricked up on the sides.

"This leads to the river," she whispered. "It is this way that his creatures bring in the provisions which keep these people alive. We may have to fight for freedom. The passage through the house is guarded. It is this way or not at all."

"Must we go in the dark?" asked Jack.

"We must! Follow me."

They could no longer see her a minute after they started, but they could hear her footsteps, and they followed her.

For some minutes they continued. Jack, who was keen to observe, knew that they were descending. At last they seemed to strike a level, and for a few minutes continued to advance, until at last they heard the woman pause.

"Have either of you got a match?" she whispered. "I think we have gone far enough. We must have a light now."

"I have," replied Jack.

"Then light it as softly as possible."

Jack struck the match upon his trousers.

As the flame flashed up Lize gave a sharp cry.

No need to ask the reason.

It was plain enough.

There, right before them, stood a negro of gigantic stature. His eyes flashed wickedly. In his hand he held a cocked revolver.

"What's this? What's this?" he cried. "No use, folks. Yo' kean't pass here!"

CHAPTER XX.

O'DOWD AGAIN.

"Who are you?"

It is Walter we have to deal with now.

He is sitting on the couch, rubbing his eyes and looking very much perplexed.

"Who are you?" he mutters staring at a dusky face thrust close to his.

Then suddenly he comes to the consciousness that he is not alone, that there are other people sitting on other couches rubbing their eyes, and—if he did but know it—looking just as stupid as he did.

He sees all this as one sees persons and places in a dream; he hears the splashing of the crocodile in the tank also, but he has not the faintest idea what all this can mean when he puts the question for the third time:

"Who are you?"

Now, contrary to Jack's belief, Walter had not partaken of the drugged wine to any extent.

He found the decanter, and forgetting the warning voice, took one or two swallows out of it, being very thirsty.

Then all at once the recollection of the warning came to him, but it came too late, for within a moment or two after that Walter was no longer Walter, but some one else altogether.

Of all that had taken place from that moment until now, when he suddenly felt some one shaking him, he knew nothing at all.

"Get up! Yo' want to get up!" said the dorky.

Dazed though he was, Walter recognized him as the same man he had seen in the mysterious room.

He held a small flask in one hand and a tiny tumbler in the other. From the tumbler he had just poured a portion of the grayish liquid which the flask contained down Walter's throat, and, had the boy been awake to see, he would have known that the dorky had done the same to each person present in the room.

"What's the matter? Where's Jack?" stammered Walter, scarcely knowing what he said.

But the dorky had moved away from him by this time. Placing the flask and bottle on a shelf, he turned and addressed the sleepy looking group.

"Looker hyar, frien's!" he exclaimed. "De ole man has done gone croaked! He's deader'n a hammer, he is. I'se sick ob dis business. T'other feller is fo' holdin' on; he t'ink de ole man come ter life ag'in. I say he won't. I'se gwine ter set youse all free, an' ef you take my advice you'll jes' skip outer this quick 's ever you can, for onct de perlice ketches onter dis yere, dere'll be trouble, suah."

"Sam," stammered Mr. Butterman, rising and staggering forward, "if you'll put us safely outside, I'll give you a thousand dollars, my man."

"I'se gwine ter do it, boss."

"Is he really dead?"

"He am."

"Then God be praised! You have given us the antidote——"
 "I'se done gone gib yo' de anecdote ob my own free will, massa. Dis yere is yo' las' chance."

"Then lead the way, my good man, and for heaven's sake be quick!" faltered the old lawyer. "Even now the craze for that infernal drug is upon me. Merciful power! I wish I might have died before I came to this evil place! Ha! A newcomer! Who is this boy?"

He paused before Walter and looked at his face fixedly.

"You are not Jack Willing?" he said.

"No, sir!" stammered Walter, who was not more than half himself even yet.

"Great heavens! Then you must be the other! Say——"

"Say, boss! Come along, now, ef yous a-comin'!" cried Sam, throwing open a door.

At the same instant Mrs. Grassland, holding her daughter's hand, tottered forward.

"You—you won't leave us behind," she faltered. "We are to go, too?"

"Ebery one goes what wants to," cried Sam, and every one of the poor drug-sodden wretches seemed to want to go, for all staggered to their feet.

They were a curious-looking assemblage.

Several of them were dressed in fantastic garments, and—— But we cannot pause to describe them. They have nothing to do with our story, which must be hurried on to a close.

Now Sam led the way through the door into one of those horrible passages.

Mr. Butterman tottered after him. Edith and her mother came next, then Walter and the others in single file after him.

Now, Walter had no realizing sense of all these happenings. His brain was still horribly muddled.

Jack—Jack! Where was Jack?

This was all he could think about.

Twice he put the question to Sam but received no answer. When he tried it the third time, the darky called back:

"Hole on, dar! No talkin' hyar. Dunno whar yo' frien' am. He's done gone off somewheres. Much as I kin do to look after you."

"Hush, my boy!" added Mr. Butterman. "If there's a chance for escape let us embrace it. We will look into your friend's case later on."

Indeed, the old lawyer seemed to be the clearest head of all that strange procession. Yet he appeared very feeble. His limbs trembled so that he could scarcely walk.

Slowly they moved on to the end of the passage.

Here Sam paused to listen, and at last, announcing that the coast was clear, opened another door and led the way up a narrow flight of stairs, and the next Walter knew he found himself coming out into the haunted chamber. They were leaving the place by the same way he had entered.

In a minute they were all gathered there, for Sam had paused.

"We'se gotter go slow," he breathed. "De perlice was in de house a while ago, an' dey's been hangin' around hyar eber sense. Dey may have come back, an'—— Oh, good gollys! Dey's hyar now!"

Suddenly through the open door five policemen burst into the room, headed by Detective O'Dowd.

"Hold on, there. You're all under arrest!" he shouted. "First of all, I want that boy!"

Was it the drug still working in Walter's brain?

Probably it was more that than anything else, for certain it is that the moment Walter caught sight of O'Dowd he seemed to lose all control of himself.

All thoughts of the others appeared to vanish.

He could think only of saving himself from the detective's hands, and he sprang back through the opening behind the chimney, and went dashing down the secret stairs.

CHAPTER XXI.

JACK AND THE GIANT.

"Hol' on, dar! Hol' on! Yo' kean't pass hyar!"

These were the words heard by Jack Willing, Harry Halstead, the detective, and old Lize, the moment the match flashed up, and the sight of that gigantic black with his revolver raised, struck terror to Jack's heart.

Was it all over. He had hoped for so much, and now to have his hopes dashed to the ground was horrible.

The match dropped from his nerveless hand, expiring as it fell.

"Stop, Cæsar! It's only me!" whined the old hag. "You wouldn't kill your master's sister—your old friend, Lize?"

"You's been no friend to nobody hyar dese five years!" answered the voice, out of the darkness.

Then in the same instant a light flashed, revealing the negro with a dark lantern in his hand.

Lize seemed to be absolutely terror-stricken.

"Let us go—let us go!" she whined. "He is dead, Cæsar. This is his grandson—this is Master John's son. You remember John."

"Who says he's dead?" cried the black. "I don' beliebe it."

"It's so. Oh, it's so!"

"Then yo' killed him."

"No, no!"

"Yo' did! Yo' killed him, an' I'll kill yo'!"

He raised the revolver again, and fired without the slightest hesitation.

"Oh, Lord, have mercy on me! I'm shot!" screamed the wretched woman, sinking to the floor.

It was an awful moment.

Jack stood like one paralyzed.

But the crack of the revolver seemed to rouse Harry Halstead to something of his old courage.

"You black fiend!" he shouted, darting forward. "You shall pay for this."

It was a bold move, but an unsuccessful one.

Crack!

Again Jack heard a shot go echoing through the passage, and Harry Halstead, with a groan, fell beside Lize.

"Now, den, it's yo' turn!" yelled Cæsar, leaping upon Jack,

and clutching him by the throat before he could raise a finger in self-defense.

As well might poor Jack tried to struggle against a giant as this powerful wretch, whose iron hand now pinned him against the wall.

"Don't yo' move!" he hissed. "I'se serbed de ole massa dese thirty years. I'se been wif him all over de worl'. His enemies am my enemies! If he's dead, an' yo' killed him, I'se gwine ter kill yo'!"

But Jack never said a word.

He could not. All power of speech seemed to have left him. Even to have saved his life the boy could not have uttered a sound.

He believed that death was near, and in that awful moment, instead of thinking of himself, he thought of Walter.

"Oh, if I could only have lived to get free and bring help to him!" were the words which seemed to flash across his brain.

He had expected the fatal shot to come on the instant, and yet a full minute passed and it did not come.

Instead of putting his threat into execution, Cæsar flashed the lantern into the boy's face.

"Golly, but you do look like Marse John!" he muttered. "Are yo' ra'ally his son?"

But Jack did not answer.

Suddenly everything began swimming about him. The next he knew he was being dragged along the passage by Cæsar back in the direction he had come.

Had he fainted?

Probably.

Even now he was so weak that if he had been left to himself he would have found it difficult to stand.

"We'll soon see about dis!" he heard Cæsar exclaim. "If de ole mars' is dead, den ebervbody dies! Dat's what I'm here fo'. To kill! Kill! Kill!"

Was the black drug-crazed like the rest?

It may have been so, but a fiend he most surely was. Doubtless the drug was responsible for this as well as for all the rest.

In a moment they were back in the secret chamber, and poor Jack's prospects became darker than ever, for the moment they had passed the threshold of the door Cæsar set up a dismal yell.

"Oh, he's dead—dead! He's dead!" he moaned. "Speak to me, mass'r! Speak to ole Cæsar! Oh, I kean't lib without yer! 'Deed I kean't!"

But for all that his grief was so great, and evidently so real, he never for an instant let go his hold on poor Jack.

"Yo' did die! Yo' did die!" he shouted in a moment. "Now, den, you die, too—Ismail shall eat yo'! Nuffin' can sabe yo' now."

He sprang through the inner door, dragging Jack after him.

Though the room was now deserted, he did not seem to notice it, but hurried to the tank in which Jack, to his intense horror, could hear the great crocodile splashing about.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

To properly describe the sensations of Jack Willing in that awful moment is beyond the powers of our pen. He was speechless, helpless, stricken with a deadly terror as the gigantic black, dropping revolver and lantern upon the floor, seized him with both hands, and raised him up with the evident intention of tossing him into the tank where the crocodile, scenting his prey, lay upon the surface of the water with open mouth.

Here was the end, Jack thought. Now, nothing could possibly save him. From the moment he had first set foot in this dreadful house until now it had been one continued struggle, but the next moment must finish all.

But no!

Help was nearer at hand than he dreamed.

Suddenly there was a rush, and some one shouted:

"Jack! Jack! Jack!"

Through the door Walter came flying.

He saw Jack, and he recognized his peril, but he seemed to have no more fear of the giant than if he had been a baby. Flinging himself forward, he struck Cæsar in the face with all his might, and this so suddenly that the negro had no time to comprehend what was coming until the deed was done.

The blow must have been a blinder, but it was not the cause of what followed.

In the same instant Walter flung his arms about Jack and wrenched him away.

Even as he did so Cæsar drew back as though to make a spring, but he forgot that close behind was the low rail surrounding the tank.

There was a wild yell—a splash!

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Save him!" groaned Jack, and then——

Why, then it seemed as though time had suddenly ceased to be, and the next Jack Willing knew he was lying on the parlor sofa.

Bending over him was Edith Grassland fanning him. Walter stood close to his head. Mr. Buttermann, looking very pale, was near his feet. Besides these there were other persons in the room, and there also was Detective O'Dowd, swaggering up and down.

"These boys are my prisoners!" he was saying. "I don't care a blame what you say about it! They are a couple of——"

"Stop!" cried Mr. Buttermann. "Be careful what you do, my man. These boys are brothers. They have told me their story, and the papers you stole from them are now in my possession. They are the last descendants of John Marlowe, the singular being whose body you saw in the room below, and are heirs to all his wealth. Briefly, my man, they are worth millions, and I will spend the last dollar of it to fight you. Take a fool's advice and drop this business while there is yet time."

For a moment O'Dowd stared at Mr. Buttermann. Then muttering something which was not audible, he left the house, tak-

ing his policemen with him, and as this move on the part of the bumptious detective was the last he made, we propose to bring our story to a close right here.

Days passed before Jack Willing fully recovered from the shock of those last awful moments, and in those days the secrets of the Haunted House on the Harlem were laid bare to the world.

But the newspaper reports given at the time were but garbled affairs at the best.

It was said that John Marlowe was a madman, and the wild stories were related about him.

Only now is the truth told and this strange person laid before the world.

Indeed, more might be said, but out of regard for Mrs. John Marlowe, formerly Edith Grassland, but now the wife of our hero, we forbear to go into the details disclosed in the voluminous manuscript found in the secret chamber.

The manuscript treated of mesmerism and the mysteries of the ancient Egyptian animal worship. Out of respect for Edith's wishes, Jack threw it in the fire, and the world will never know the full details of the doings in that strange house.

Hence, all we can do is to tell how it fared with the different characters connected with our story after that memorable night. This done, no more need be said.

In that last moment of horror Jack fainted again. In the next—fortunately for both the boys—O'Dowd and his gang rushed in and captured them, dragging them to the rooms above, where Mr. Buttermann interfered, as has been shown.

Do not ask us to speak of the fate of Cæsar.

He was never seen again, but the crocodile was shot next morning by a man whom Mr. Buttermann engaged for the purpose, for the old lawyer immediately took charge of affairs.

Of course Jack told his story, and search was made for the secret passage through which he had, in company with old Lize and Harry Halstead, attempted to escape.

It was readily found, and traced to its end, which proved to be the cellar of a small cottage on the bank of the Harlem.

Here Cæsar had lived alone, the dread of all the neighborhood, and were we disposed to go into details, many are the strange stories we could relate about the murderous black—stories heard by Jack later on.

In the passage the dead body of old Lize was discovered, but Harry Halstead was not dead. They took him out unconscious with a bullet in his neck, but after a tedious illness the young detective fully recovered, and in time resumed his old place on the force.

Concerning the unfortunates rescued from the underground den, we shall say nothing, for Jack so desires it.

Sufficient is it that Jack and Walter, with their newly acquired wealth, regarded these people as their especial charge.

Several are now dead, but one or two still live. Who or what they were will never be known to the world.

Did Mr. Buttermann know of the existence of John Marlowe when he took Jack to the haunted house.

We are obliged to admit that he did. He had known it all

along, and met the men in the haunted room from time to time.

It was by Marlowe's order that Jack had been brought from France.

He thought himself dying at the time, and sent for the lawyer. Later he recovered, and determined that his grandson should be abandoned to his fate. Hence, when Mr. Buttermann put in an appearance that day, he brought his strange powers to bear upon him, and by force of will caused the lawyer to follow him into the room below, there to join the wretched victims of his strange craze.

Such was the secret of the missing man whose strange disappearance had brought so much trouble to Jack.

But Mrs. Grassland's case was the most singular.

The widow had hired the house in good faith, and was altogether ignorant of its bad reputation.

The cause of her strange actions on the night on which Edith disappeared may be summed up in three words.

She was mesmerized.

Upon entering the haunted chamber she encountered Marlowe.

One glance of his eyes was sufficient.

From that moment Mrs. Grassland knew nothing, so she declared.

She had no recollection of returning to Jack, or of dismissing her servants, as was afterwards proved she actually did do. Nor could she tell how she subsequently came to be in the underground rooms.

Doubtless Sam, the darky, could have told, but in the confusion which followed the encounter with O'Dowd, Sam managed to take himself off, and was never seen again.

More would have been known, also, had old Lize lived.

But Lize was dead, and her secrets died with her.

Thus one thing, which more than all else puzzled Jack, namely, how she knew that Walter was to be under the High Bridge at a certain hour on the night the boys first met was never made plain.

Walter could shed no light on the mystery. He declared that he had never seen the strange old creature up to that time.

Of course Harry Halstead was mesmerized, and Edith, too. Their capture had been easy work.

It was the same, no doubt, with Jack, when he thought he saw that ghostly dinner party in the haunted chamber.

But enough of this. Mesmerism fully accounts for it all, for the skillful mesmerist can make a man believe he sees and hears whatever he chooses, and probably no man more skilled in mind control than John Marlowe ever lived.

The Latin paper found in the pocket, proved to be an account of old Marlowe's early doings written out by Walter's adopted father.

That his grandfather sent him the one hundred dollar bill Jack always believed.

Of course when Jack came to think matters over, he was not altogether pleased with the conduct of Mr. Buttermann.

But in consideration of the prompt and skillful manner in which the old lawyer managed affairs afterward, he was willing to pass this over.

He disengaged himself from the man as soon as possible, however, and after that saw nothing of him. But this was partly owing to the fact that Mr. Buttermann soon left New York, for his brother lawyers were beginning to give him the cold shoulder, owing to his long connection with a client who certainly ought to have been handed over to the police.

Nothing more was ever heard from O'Dowd, and in due time Walter inherited all his adopted father's wealth, which, added to his share of John Marlowe's estate, made him much richer than Jack.

Not that Jack cared.

He was satisfied with his share, which amounted to more than a million. Besides, Jack soon married Edith Grassland, and what in the shape of wealth can equal a faithful wife?

To Jack fell the old mansion, and his first care was to pull it down, for he was only too anxious to forget himself and have the world forget, the dark doings which occurred within its walls.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE ON THE HARLEM exists no more.

THE END.

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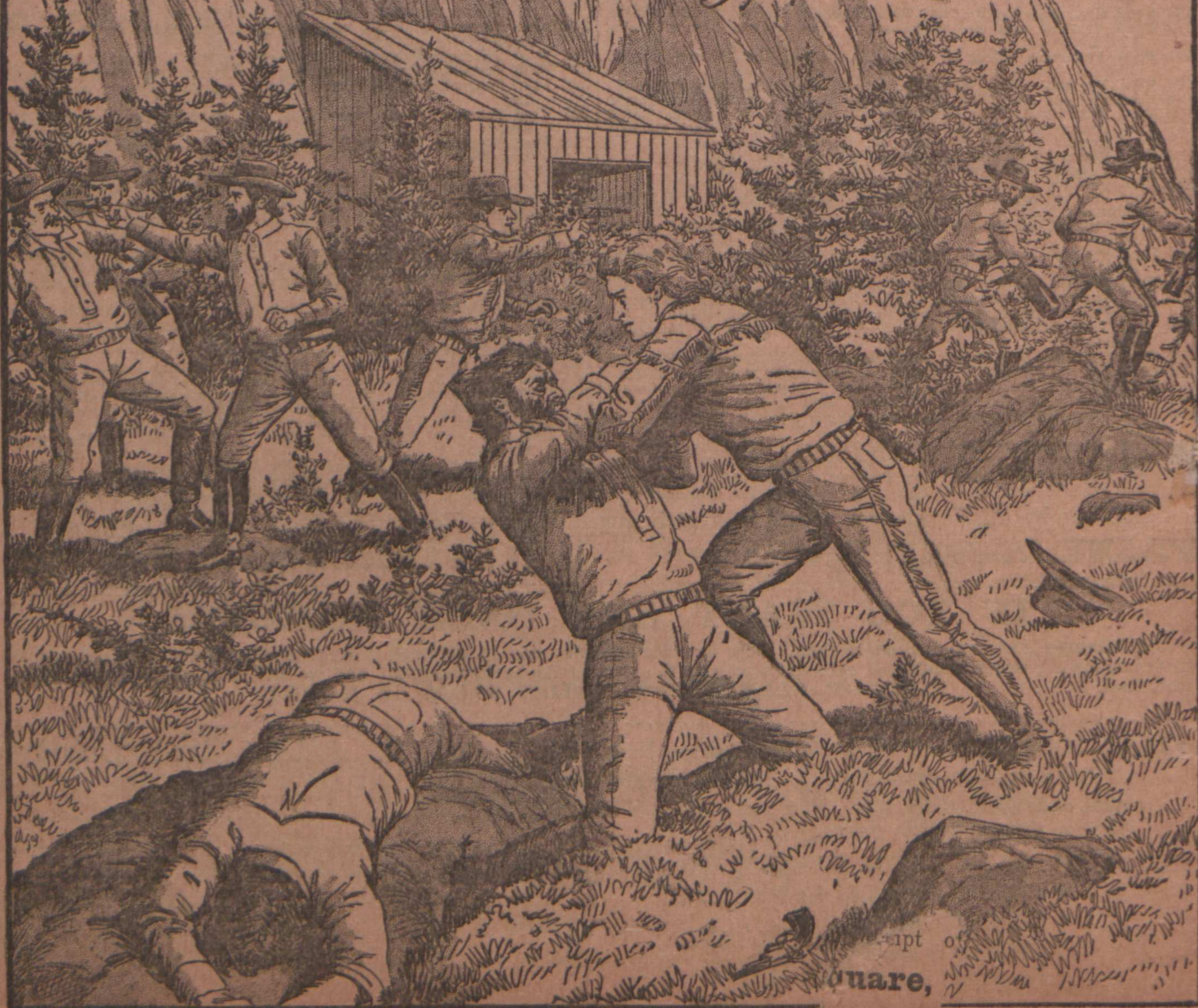
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